

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: CONSTRUCTIONS OF VIOLENT
JAMAICAN MASCULINITY IN FILM AND
LITERATURE

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Greg Dimitriadis and Cameron McCarthy sketch out what they see as an emergent postcolonial aesthetic percolating in the postcolonial artist's imagination. According to their analysis, postcolonial artists make meaning in their work through three critical motifs that help shape this aesthetic: "*counterhegemonic representation, double or triple coding, and emancipatory or utopic visions*" (19, italics in original). Counterhegemonic representation "rework[s] the center-versus-periphery distinction . . . to look beyond its strictures to new histories, new discourses, new ways of being" (24). Double coding combines "two or more fields of reference or idiom in any given work" pulling images from places such as "the East and the West, the first world and the Third, the colonial master and the slave" (26). And utopic visions are about "imagining possibility even when faced with impossible barriers" (30). My project is fundamentally interested in constructing healthy (masculine) identities and its arguments are ultimately guided by their first and third motifs.

Using feminist theory, masculinity studies, cultural studies and postcolonial theory, I focus on the representation of black Jamaican men as violent criminal beings in three films (*The Harder They Come*, *Third World Cop* and *Shottas*), two novels (*The Harder They Come* and *For Nothing at All*) and one ethnographic travelogue (*Born Fi' Dead*). I argue that “real/reel” Jamaican masculinity is ultimately connected to gun violence and the most popular films out of Jamaica over the past thirty years only perpetuate this image. While not the only source for role models, visual images play a significant role in the lives of young men (and women) who are trying to live up to social standards of masculinity. With limited access to social mobility, they often emulate the shotta (gangster) glory that they see sparkling on the screen.

Through close readings of these texts, I show how hegemonic masculinity is reinforced and reveal that non-violent models of masculinity do exist, despite being overshadowed by violent “heroes.” I call for that “utopic vision,” to excavate the vulnerable and intervene on behalf of peace to help young men and boys find alternative models of masculinity and ultimately create sustainable communities.

CONSTRUCTIONS OF VIOLENT JAMAICAN MASCULINITY IN FILM
AND LITERATURE

By

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Dedication

To patience, faith and possibility . . .

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I am grateful for the love from all of my family and friends, as well as the support from my committee, but would like to especially honor the lifelines thrown out to me by my mother Peggy, sister Ronke', friend Tanya and advisor/friend Merle.

Thank you for lifting me over the finish line!

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INTRODUCTION

I could settle for being a man, or I could struggle to become a human being.

- Robert Jensen

Several questions contribute to my interest in decoding black masculinity both in the United States and the Caribbean. I am particularly interested in black masculinity in the Caribbean because it seems to occupy an interesting global space that needs more attention. Because I live outside of the Caribbean, I see the globalized images more often and these are what most concern me at this time. In places outside of the Caribbean, the region is interestingly condensed into just one island – Jamaica. Perhaps because of its size, or because of the worldwide popularity of its musical forms, it is the island of Jamaica that becomes code for the entire Caribbean. So when I see “Caribbean” masculinity represented in the “West,” it tends to be a black Jamaican man performing in three ways. He is either a laid-back “hey mon, no problem!” ganja smoking Rasta, a hypersexualized “Dexter” (so named in Eddie Murphy’s 1987 stand-up routine *Raw* where the microphone cord he swings over his shoulder becomes an extra-long penis) who is more sexually potent than the U.S. myth of the black male rapist, or a hyperviolent “boomba claat” growling shotta (gangster). Sometimes he is just part of one of these images or an odd combination of all three. Recently, however, I have noticed that he has been appearing most often as the hyperviolent image in a series of

shotta films coming out of Jamaica. I use the term “shotta film” to echo Robert Arjet’s definition of a “gunplay film” where “neither guns nor the people who wield them behave realistically, plots are simple and predictable, and the largest appeal appears to be in watching men killing each other and blowing things up” (125). However, the use of the word “shotta” is the patois term for “gangster” so that geographically locates these films in Jamaica.

I pause here to say that my theoretical interest in these issues emerges from very personal experiences of existence. As I have moved through my years of graduate study I have developed and deepened a social justice activism that is now an inseparable part of who I am. Studying in the English department and teaching African American, American and Women’s studies courses along with becoming a campus “diversity trainer” and later Director of Multicultural Affairs gave me new lenses through which to see my own life and socialization, and through which to look at the world around me. My immediate world was shaped by being part of the first-generation of my Caribbean family to be born in the United States. Barbados realities and ways of knowing enveloped my childhood in ways that left me feeling very much connected to that “home.” Annual visits to family “back home” cemented a certain sense of belonging. However, in adulthood I recognized an outsider-insider status that I occupied with this home place. Having been born and schooled in the U.S., I was not Bajan, yet at the same time I felt that I somehow was not fully American either. This hybridity is a source of

insecurity but also a unique analytical space and I will return to this theme later in the discussion.

As I have begun to think about choosing a life partner, I have been thinking about the qualities that I would find attractive in a mate. Using my social justice lenses to guide my attractions, I know I want someone not afraid to experience and exhibit a full range of emotion, with vulnerability, strength, courage, fear, and tenderness as part of that package – someone who lives outside of the prescribed “real man” box that I teach about in my diversity workshops. At the same time, I am often surprised by my own reluctance to let go of some of the physical attributes stereotypically associated with masculinity, evinced, for example, in a reluctance to get involved with someone who is shorter than I am or someone whose body is not lean. Where did these desires come from? Why is there residue still clinging to an adult mind that clearly “knows better?” I recognize that I have been socialized/brainwashed by media and family and popular culture, but I felt that my heightened sense of awareness about these very issues would allow me to break free of them. As an African American Afro-Caribbean woman, I know it is in the best interest of myself and my diasporic communities to affirm a holistic range of black masculinities. But where and when do I fall back into the traps of living in the “real man” box and what in my life is contributing to its construction? Could the popular culture images that I see be a contributing factor? There *is* something seductive about the performative

bravado that emanates from some dancehall songs and in this way, Jamaican men do surround me on the dance floor or while listening to CDs. However, as I am lulled into feeling a larger cultural connection with these male images, another part of me bristles at the sight of ever more of the same kinds of male images.

The What

From US-directed *Kla\$h* in 1995 and *Belly* in 1998 to *Third World Cop* in 1999, *Shottas* in 2002 and *Rude Boy* in 2003, there is a troubling trend of violent Jamaican masculinity on the cinematic screen. Using postcolonial theory, feminist theory, masculinity studies and cultural studies, this project analyzes the various images of masculinity in these films against a backdrop of multidisciplinary texts. Beginning with Perry Henzell's 1972 film *The Harder They Come* and its rogue community hero Ivanhoe Martin, I consider how two of the aforementioned contemporary films translate *The Harder They Come* into something much more sinister than it represents when considered alone. These newer versions of "real" Jamaican manhood are riding the waves of a disturbing current whose direction and pull deserve some public attention.

Gunplay across Gunscapes

The images of these shottas flicker across the screen in my head as some recent incidents in the US capture media attention. When I learned about the November 2007 death of Washington football team safety Sean Taylor, I could not help but think that there is some sense of urgency embedded in this examination of “black” masculinity and violence – albeit a black Jamaican masculinity. I also remember the young male shooter from December 2007 in the Omaha mall who killed eight people and then himself after leaving a suicide note with his mother. At the end of the note, he seemed to relish the post-mortem possibility that “now I’ll be famous.” That type of grizzly fame also seemed to occupy the mind of another young male shooter who killed 32 people and then himself on the campus of Virginia Tech in April 2007, because he mailed a multimedia manifesto that included gun-toting pictures of himself to the media before the massacre. As his image flashed across multiple television screens in the frozen pose of guns drawn for attack, it was like looking at a clip from a shotta film. Except these clips (both cinematic and ballistic) were real and the connection between guns, violence and masculinity felt and still feels all too obvious.

I see the proliferation of these Jamaican shotta films since the mid-1990s as oddly connected to these U.S. incidents. Although coming from a different landscape, they are really part of the same global “gunscape” (Springwood) where individual shooters do not matter as much as the

broader picture of what is going on with violence and masculinity. As Springwood says, “Even though women have often utilized arms to fight war, . . . guns remain a masculine idiom” (20). Therefore examining these films is not only an opportunity to examine the relationship of masculinity to violence, but a chance to search for deeper cultural definitions of masculinity. Taken as a collective, these shotta films can reveal more about masculinity than viewers may realize. As Arjet reminds us, gunplay films are often dismissed as “stupid” and “senseless” entertainment. But what this derision obfuscates is that there is always meaning behind representations of screen violence. As he says,

Like actual violence, representations of violence always mean something –there can be no such thing as ‘senseless violence,’ just as there is no such thing as ‘senseless tourism’ or a ‘senseless hairstyle.’ Violence is a signifying practice, whether or not its perpetrators want it to be. People undertake violent acts at specific times, in specific ways, for specific reasons. It is the job of the observer to ask: *‘Why this violence, in this story, in this way?’ ‘Why these particular weapons?’ ‘Why these responses?’* Even more than real-world violence, *representations of violence are artifacts of ideology*. They are far more under the control of their creators, and they will always bear the traces of the ideology that guided their creation. If ‘violence itself is a means of signifying, ordering and understanding’ (Slocum 1995), it is incumbent on us . . .

to understand the reasons why those narratives, . . . have become so popular in our time. (126 – 127, emphasis added).

In Jamaica, the “artifacts of ideology” rest on a legacy of European colonialism and European colonialism rests on a legacy of violence. Because of this historical inheritance, it could be useful to situate these “artifacts of ideology” in the context of postcolonial theory. This requires a brief but necessary turn towards the history of colonialism and decolonization.

The Postcolonial

Ania Loomba defines “colonialism” as “the forcible takeover of land and economy, and, in the case of European colonialism, a restructuring of non-capitalist economies in order to fuel European capitalism” (23). Although she reminds us that decolonization and the “legacies of colonialism are . . . varied and multiple” she also states that they “obviously share some important features” (20). The most prevalent shared feature of European colonialism is the centrality of European domination, advancement and thinking as put forward in what is historically known as the European Renaissance or Enlightenment (Loomba 59, 60). These exclusionary “meta-narratives” centered white European men and domination became the tool for constructing identity (Loomba 40). This is the implicit premise of the Enlightenment project and as Loomba says, “Many nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers equated the advance of European colonisation [sic]

with the triumph of science and reason over the forces of superstition, and indeed many colonised [sic] peoples took the same view. . . . [Moreover,] across the colonial spectrum, European technology and learning was regarded as progressive” (24). This European domination and advancement was enforced through violence (both physical and psychological) and as a result, the challenge to such European domination and advancement (otherwise known as *decolonization*) is also violent. This process erupted in the form of worldwide independence movements and as Frantz Fanon says, “decolonization is always a violent phenomenon” (*Wretched* 35). Loomba reminds us that while decolonization happened differently around the globe (13), the overall impulse behind these movements was to overthrow European centering and many British colonies gained their independence in the 1960s and 1970s. For example, Jamaica became independent in 1962. In Loomba’s words, anti-colonial (and feminist) movements “needed to challenge dominant ideas of history, culture and representation” (39). Postcolonial theory is preoccupied with the nature of such challenges on a variety of ideological levels and takes up these concerns in a variety of disciplines (Ashcroft et al 2006, 5)

However, critics continue to argue about the term “postcolonial” because its prefix seems to imply that life is radically different after/post colonialism. But although former colonies are technically independent after they get their own leaders and other trappings of new government, the

ideological residue of colonialism bleeds through the fabric of the “history, culture and representation” that Loomba mentions and unsettles this notion of anything really being over (Loomba 12, McLeod 33). As McLeod says,

The hoisting of a newly independent colony’s flag might promise a crucial moment when governmental power shifts to those in the newly independent nation, yet it is crucial to realise [sic] that colonial values do not simply evaporate on the first day of independence. . . .

Colonialism’s *representations, reading practices* and *values* are not so easily dislodged. (32, italics in original)

Although postcolonial theory sifts through these lingering “representations, reading practices and values” (and I would add that I am thinking of “reading” here as broadly defined to include filmic as well as literary texts), for some the term “post” does not seem to account for neo-colonialism. Moreover, there is a question about whether the “post” really begins at the point of colonial contact or at the point of independence. In places like the Caribbean where we have staggered independence dates that begin with Haiti in 1804 all the way to Jamaica in 1962 and beyond, how do we really define the “post?” Or in the words of Ella Shohat, “When exactly, then, does the ‘postcolonial’ begin?” (as quoted in Loomba 12).

Critics also take issue with the suffix in “postcolonialism” because they feel like it re-centers colonial rule and ignores the contributions of the

indigenous populations that were there prior to colonization. As Loomba summarizes,

What came before colonial rule? What indigenous ideologies, practices and hierarchies existed alongside colonialism and interacted with it? Colonialism did not inscribe itself on a clean slate, and it cannot therefore account for everything that exists in 'postcolonial' societies (20 - 21).

The argument here is that if postcolonial theory is about "alternative knowledges" (Young 7), then why call up the original site of power (ie. colonialism) at all. Even with all of these tensions in mind, postcolonial theory can nevertheless offer a useful framework for situating the constructions that have been affected by this colonial past. As McLeod says,

the term 'postcolonialism' is *not* the same as 'after colonialism', as if colonial values are no longer to be reckoned with. It does *not* define a radically new historical era, nor does it herald a brave new world where all the ills of the colonial past have been cured. Rather, 'postcolonialism' recognises [sic] both historical *continuity* and *change*. On the one hand, it acknowledges that the material realities and modes of representation common to colonialism are still very much with us today, even if the political map of the world has changed through decolonisation [sic]. But on the other hand, it asserts the promise, the possibility, and the continuing necessity of change, while also

recognising [sic] that important challenges and changes have already been achieved. (33, italics in original)

This situating of the present against the backdrop of the continuing influence of the past offers one set of lenses through which contemporary representations of male violence in Jamaica might be viewed.

It is interesting that postcolonial theory began to formally assert itself during the time that the dust was settling from many of these independence movements around the world. Many scholars attribute the theory's beginnings to the 1978 publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* which, in the words of McLeod, "explored the extent to which colonialism created a way of seeing the world, an order of things that was to be learned as true and proper; . . . [and] examined how the knowledge that the Western imperial powers formed about their colonies helped continually to justify their subjugation" (21). On the one hand, Said's project unmasked colonial justification and on the other hand, battles for independence simultaneously threw off the mantle of colonial justification. Again, the overall aim of postcolonial theory is to de-center the meta-narrative that positions Western/European ideologies as natural, reasonable and logical; to challenge the Enlightenment project that created a justification narrative, a mythic *History* that had to subsume all other *histories* and then be sold around the world. The difference between *History* (with a capital H) and *history* (with a small h) is what postcolonial scholars such as Edouard Glissant see as the rupturing of these meta-

narratives, the History of the colonial elites, with the histories of everyday people (Glissant). The recovery of histories within these ruptures may sometimes be in conflict with the former History, or even with the other histories, but these multiple stories will create a much richer narrative than the one-sided version of the Enlightenment tale (Glissant).

Mythic Meta-narratives

The contemporary shotta narrative attempts a convincing not unlike that suggested for the Enlightenment narrative. They subtly sell a particular justification about how the world operates and indirectly teach their viewers about what it means to be a “real” Jamaican man. In talking about the iconic power that *The Harder They Come* and *Third World Cop* had/have, Jamaican cultural critic Carolyn Cooper posits that both “illustrate the indigenization of an imported American culture of ‘heroism’ and gun violence; both films glamorize Hollywood reconstructions of masculinity. [And] These distorted images are greedily imbibed by gullible Jamaican youth searching for role models” (“I Shot” 153). Given the aforementioned legacy of violence and resistance from colonial to contemporary times, violence might be considered both a Hollywood importation and a continuation of a colonial narrative, but Cooper reminds us of a key point. The supposed senseless stupidity of these films distracts us from the fact that these are really “gun narratives” that are

glamorized (in Arjet's words). And more importantly, these gun narratives act as mythic meta-narratives of our time.

Myths describe the world and how it works while giving audiences a prescription for what to do and how to do it (Arjet 126). The Enlightenment myth legitimized the supposed supremacy of Europeans to the colonizers as well as to the colonized. It embedded the image of the white gentleman civilizing the black savage and presented, "'a world view which believes in the absolute superiority of the human over the nonhuman and the subhuman, the masculine over the feminine . . . , and the modern or progressive over the traditional or the savage' (Nandy 1983: x)" (as quoted in Oyewùmí 256). In this myth, the white European gentleman is cast as the modern, progressive, supernatural *human* being essentially saving the non/subhumans from their own backward barbarism. Therefore, violence is seen as an appropriate method of control. Because of this, colonization and the Enlightenment myth, as well as decolonization, are also kinds of gun narratives because gun violence was central to their success. However, this should not overshadow the insidious psychological violence that took shape in ideological spheres such as religion and education. Loomba makes this point when she says, "The barbarity of native men was offered as a major justification for imperial rule, and it shaped colonial policy" (131). And Frantz Fanon underscores this point when he says,

The white world, the only honorable one, barred me from all participation. A man was expected to behave like a man. I was expected to behave like a black man – or at least like a nigger. . . . I resolved, since it was impossible for me to get away from an *inborn complex*, to assert myself as a BLACK MAN. Since the other hesitated to recognize me, there remained only one solution: to make myself known. (*Black Skin* 114 – 115, italics in original)

Quite simply, “. . . Empires colonise [sic] imaginations” (McLeod 22) and as Fanon intimates, it takes intentional work to resist mental colonization. However, this making oneself known, or refashioning a (postcolonial) identity is the paradoxical preoccupation of these shotta films. On one level, the men in these film narratives are making an identity that resists the middle-class model of gentlemanly manhood that smacks of neo-colonialism – what David Scott calls “*ruud bwai* self-fashioning” – a manhood that “disrupts the dominant regime of cultural-political truth that bodies are to be educated into a particular raced/classed regime of sensibility, breeding, and conduct. It constitutes a site of internal *danger* to the norms of bourgeois-liberal civility” (214, italics in original). Yet on another level, embodying this site of “danger” is ultimately detrimental to the self and the community. It is important to affirm challenges to a regime that devalues one’s self, a regime that Scott describes as, “demand[ing] as a condition of his participation that he be ‘educated’ for it, which is to say, transformed, made over into a liberal

citizen-subject who knows to leave his disreputable, unrepresentable difference behind when he enters the public realm” (216). At the same time, it is counterproductive to create an identity that completely terrorizes that public realm. These films seem to send the message that that terrorization is the most desirable way to create a (postcolonial) identity and become a “real” Jamaican man.

As will be examined later, men operate in these shotta films in very supernatural ways because masculinity coupled with gun violence always conquers all. This supernatural ability to solve all issues turns these characters into mythic heroes. Keep in mind that myths also have archetypes embedded in them that do not change. Therefore you will consistently see that nothing a man has is his unless he can defend it in gun combat with other men (Arjet 129). The behavior of these men largely does not change across these films. Therefore, the patterns that emerge across these shotta films are mirrors of embedded social scripts of hegemonic masculinity.

While the performance of masculinities varies across space and time, it is safe to say that the dominant versions of Jamaican masculinity are carried not only by Jamaican men, but reinforced by women and children too. On some level, there are social benefits and rewards for men (and boys) who act out the dominant script of violent manhood. This script requires that men be tough, fearless, always in control, emotionally distant, financially stable, dominant over and distinct from women and subordinate masculinities, and

staunchly heterosexual. As Robert Jensen says, “Men are assumed to be naturally competitive and aggressive, and being a ‘real man’ is therefore marked by the struggle for control, conquest, and domination. A man looks at the world, sees what he wants, and takes it” (26). However, one key ingredient in this list that is rarely talked about in terms of its explicit connection to the control, aggression and dominance, is how guns are seen as natural extensions of masculinity. The social meaning produced by the cinematic myths of gunplay films is decoded by Arjet when he notices two things that always happen in their plots. First, men are constructed as inherently violent, and second, guns become fetishized totemic symbols (137). I notice the same pattern in these shotta films. Therefore, shotta films make the Jamaican script for dominant masculinity inextricably linked to guns and gun violence.

As we will see, while the rewards for following this script are seemingly enormous for the heroes of these films, the behavior they exhibit is in and of itself damaging to any model of healthy masculinity. The epigraph implies that unpacking the narrative of hegemonic masculinity means getting closer to recovering a sense of humanity because in the dominant conception of masculinity: “No one is ever safe, and *everyone loses something*” (27, emphasis added). In some respects, there might have been some room for that recovery of humanity in Perry Henzell’s 1972 film *The Harder They Come* because it includes a level of social critique that seems to be missing from the

contemporary shotta films that developed in its wake. The Jamaican films produced since the mid-1990s go beyond the level of entertainment to glorify obscene perversions of what it means to be Jamaican and male and they are wildly popular. So if these are the films that are becoming more and more popular and therefore more and more mainstream, we need to study these film representations of Jamaican men to see exactly what they mean.

The Ballistically Pornographic

If myths are preoccupied with “delineating the customs or ideals of society” as part of the American Heritage definition says, then myths can act as a kind of social mirror. We can interpret what customs or ideals a society values from looking at its circulating myths. Robert Jensen makes a parallel argument about pornographic films. While seemingly unrelated at first, closer examination of his analysis of pornography reveals striking similarities to shotta films and even colonization. He notices that there has been a dramatic increase in the level of “overt cruelty toward, and degradation of, women in contemporary mass-marketed pornography” at the same time that there has been rising “acceptance of pornography in the mainstream of contemporary [US] culture” (16 – 17). The logical question would be “In a society that purports to be civilized, wouldn’t we expect most people to reject sexual material that becomes ever more dismissive of the humanity of women? How do we explain the simultaneous appearance of more, and increasingly more

intense, ways to humiliate women sexually and the rising popularity of the films that present those activities" (17)? He reveals that the underlying assumption that the US routinely objects to cruelty and degradation is fundamentally wrong because the mainstream/normative values of the country actually hinge upon "the logic of domination and subordination that is central to patriarchy, hyper-patriotic nationalism, white supremacy, and a predatory corporate capitalism" (17). Therefore using feminist critical theory, he uses "pornography-as-a-mirror" to reveal the ways in which men have been trained to act in misogynistic and ultimately self-destructive ways. These normative values underlie the colonial project as well. In discussing postcolonial theory, John McLeod defines patriarchy in ways that echo Jensen's revelations:

The term 'patriarchy' refers to those systems – political, material and imaginative – which invest power in men and marginalise [sic] women. Like colonialism, patriarchy manifests itself in both concrete ways (such as disqualifying women a vote) and at the level of the imagination. It asserts certain representational systems which create an order of the world presented to individuals as 'normal' or 'true'. Also like colonialism, patriarchy exists in the midst of resistances to its authority. (173 – 174)

In this way, we can see that pornography is obviously linked to patriarchy and patriarchy is also linked to colonialism. But how do we get to shotta films from pornography?

The pornography that Jensen describes is sex in warped excess. Men are doing things to women on screen that women in the everyday life of the viewer would largely object to. As he says, "Pornography, with its overwhelming male clientele, moves toward sexual acts that women in day-to-day life do not seek out because most women find them either not pleasurable, painful, or denigrating. Those are the very same acts that men seem to find intensely pleasurable to watch in pornography" (58). Therefore the men on screen act as mythic heroes in a way, allowing male viewers to imagine themselves in their place. They can fantasize about doing those things and moving through the world operating like those men on the screen. I see shotta films fulfilling the same kind of fantasy.

Sexual excess is one of the things that makes porn pleasurable. Men that watch sometimes talk about wanting to be both entertained and titillated. As Robert Jensen says, "it is clear that contemporary pornography predominantly reflects the male sexual imagination rooted in a dominant conception of masculinity: sex as control, conquest, domination, and the acquisition of pleasure by the taking of women" (98). Extending Jensen's argument, I believe that shotta films also entertain and titillate in a way, but instead of *sexual* excess, they play out scenes of *violence* in excess. In addition,

this violence is primarily enacted with the use of guns (like some of the methods used during colonialism). Given the undeniable sexualization/phallocentrism of the gun, entertainment and titillation takes on an interesting twist in this melding of masculinity, violence and sexuality. The heroes of these shotta films are not just ballistically sharp, they are (hetero)sexually lethal. As C. Richard King aptly points out, “guns amplify sexualized power” (87) and generally it is the man with the biggest “gun” who wins. There is something pornographic about these violent orgies. So Jensen’s framework for analyzing masculinity through the lens of pornography is useful.

He argues that radical feminist theory offers men “not just a way to help those being hurt, but a way to understand that the same system of male dominance that hurt so many women also made it impossible for men to be fully human” (9). As he notes, “There is great individual variation in the human species, but there also are patterns in any society. And when those patterns tell us things about ourselves and the world in which we live that are difficult, we often want to look away” (14). Because he is analyzing patterns of masculinity in films that rely on patriarchal systems of domination and subordination, I find his framing questions useful for looking at patterns of masculinity in shotta films because they also rely on patriarchal systems of domination and subordination. Moreover, postcolonial theory challenges those patriarchal systems of domination and subordination. Although he

presents a very different landscape and subject matter, there are striking parallels with my study. This is particularly evident when he breaks down the core elements in these films. Using the work of radical feminist scholar Andrea Dworkin, he notes that the subordination of women in pornography is generally enacted through four basic elements:

- Objectification: when a 'human being, through social means, is made less than human, turned into a thing or commodity, bought and sold.'
- Hierarchy: a question of power, with 'a group on top (men) and a group on the bottom (women).'
- Submission: when acts of obedience and compliance become necessary for survival, members of oppressed groups learn to anticipate the orders and desires of those who have power over them, and their compliance is then used by the dominant group to justify its dominance.
- Violence: when it becomes 'systematic, endemic enough to be unremarkable and normative, usually taken as an implicit right of the one committing the violence.' (53 – 54)

These “elements of the pornographic” wholly apply to the colonizing process because the colonized certainly experienced each and every stage. More importantly, these elements are the underlying normative values of a postcolonial society such as Jamaica. Postcolonial critics such as Dorothy

Lane remind us that the language of colonialism is really a language of male penetration into female lands: “female spaces penetrated by male reason and science . . . with the male colonizers accompanied by male children who reproduce and eventually inherit his power” (2). And Ania Loomba raises the point that colonial Others were imagined as having an abnormal sexuality:

Renaissance travel writings and plays repeatedly connect deviant sexuality with racial and cultural outsiders and far away places, which, as Anne McClintock puts it, ‘had become what can be called a *porno-tropics* for the European imagination – a fantastic magic lantern of the mind onto which Europe projected its forbidden sexual desires and fears’ (McClintock 1995: 22). (131, emphasis added)

This projection of forbidden desires and fears is at the heart of the pornography industry. More importantly, this projection of forbidden desires and fears (as well as the four “elements of the pornographic”) are at the heart of these shotta films.

More than Just Fantasy

I am not the policy maker nor am I the sociologist, but I am noticing a trend in these films that I think deserves attention because when we put them all together they are showing the same type of narrow image and it is more than just a horrible construction. This body of popular culture work is reflecting a reality. Robert Jensen counters the “it’s just entertainment, it’s just

fantasy” argument by stressing that pornographic films are not just a fantasy. They are showing real acts that are happening to real people with real consequences. While shotta films are acting out a script, we must remember Arjet’s questions about gunplay films: “‘Why this violence, in this story, in this way?’ Why these particular weapons?’ ‘Why these responses’” (127)? He makes the insightful point that the popularity of gunplay films rose sharply at a time in US history when “mainstream white men . . . shared a sense of helplessness and impotence” (130) due to the changes brought on by shifts from a manufacturing to a service economy. Therefore, the films often featured the “working stiff” “struggling against an overwhelming bureaucracy, an unsympathetic boss, or duplicitous government agents [or] sometimes all three” (130). Although they were fictional treatments of anxieties essentially based in privilege, the films were still reflecting a particular lived social reality. Arjet asks why do the heroes in U.S. gunplay films such as *Dirty Harry*, *Rambo II*, *Die Hard*, *Raw Deal*, *Above the Law* and *Hard to Kill* all have such violent responses to the same helplessness and/or impotence? As he says, for “real” men the bottom line is that “the power to confront oppressive authority must be channeled through gunplay” (130). Nothing short of this is acceptable: “Without this power, there is only death at best, humiliation and feminization at worst” (131).

The men on screen are literally acting out a scripted role written for them by a writer or writers (generally male) who on some level believe that

these are the most appropriate responses to whatever crises are faced by these characters. This is precisely why we should pay close attention to the patterns these mythic heroes lay out. What are the consequences of these violent versions of manhood? How do these images contribute to the kinds of adult men young boys become later in real life? And what about the fact that some of the violence enacted on screen is taking place in real people's lives and in real communities? Remember that Arjet says, "Even more than real-world violence, representations of violence are *artifacts of ideology*" (127, emphasis added). What do we do with that? How do these films help essentially colonize the mind and reinforce the naturalness of this type of dominant masculinity? How does it normalize this violence, and make it okay to solve your problems this way?

This is not to say that once a man watches a shotta film, he automatically becomes violent, or to imply that these films are absolutely detrimental to all viewers. Instead it is an effort to analyze something more systemic. Robert Jensen reminds us that "When we talk about trends in a society, we are trying to understand patterns, and to identify a pattern in human affairs is not to assert that every single person behaves the same way. But that individual variation does not mean we cannot identify patterns and learn from them." (49) The pattern in these films reinforces what Kamala Kempadoo calls "hypersexuality" and "heteropatriarchy" which she defines as follows:

The first relates to a pervasive, long-standing ideology that holds that Caribbean people possess hyperactive libidos and overly rely upon sexuality as a marker of identity. Caribbean sexuality then is not normal, but excessive at times pathological and at others unruly, and it is this characteristic of the people and its region that shapes images, policies, and economic programs from without, as well as internal ideas about self, culture, and development. The second concept captures the interplay as well as the specificity of two distinct sets of relations of power that are in operation in Caribbean societies: heterosexism and patriarchy. While both heterosexism and patriarchy seem to nestle around masculine dominance, the combination, i.e., heteropatriarchy, signals a distinction and relatedness between the ways in which sexuality and gender are socially, legally, and politically organized. It is the combination that marginalizes and criminalizes gendered subjects who transgress established sexual boundaries. Heteropatriarchy is thus a concept . . . to denote a structuring principle in Caribbean societies that privileges heterosexual, promiscuous masculinity and subordinates feminine sexuality, normalizing relations of power that are intolerant of and oppressive toward sexual desires and practices that are outside of or oppose the dominant sexual and gender regimes. This structuring principle privileges men's experiences, definitions, and perceptions of

sexuality, whereby not only are appreciations of female (hetero)sexuality obscured, but homoeroticism and same-gender sexual relations are denied legitimacy. In this structure, coupled with a discourse of hypersexuality, lesbians, gays, transgenders, prostitutes, and other 'sexual deviants' are cast not only as oversexed Caribbean subjects but as outlaws and noncitizens. (7,9)

True citizens of this Jamaican nation therefore are these mythic heroes. Big, bad, male and armed. Joan Burbick makes the point about the highly racial and gendered view of US history when she discovered that "...popular culture has only reinforced this sense of how white men hold the destiny of the nation in their hands, especially if one hand holds a gun" (xviii). As a nation born out of violent colonial past, the message coming out of Jamaica in these films is clear: "Without a weapon, men simply don't count" (Arjet 131).

Foreign Film Fixation

It is abundantly clear that these images reveal a great deal about power on multiple levels. There is the power of the hero, the power of the ideology of masculinity he portrays, the power wielded by his gun(s), and also the power behind the overall project itself. We must stop to ask whose perceptions are being represented and who ultimately benefits from presenting these films? They are part of a global cinematic lure that captured

audiences across the Caribbean whenever possible. From the evolution of cinema to the in-home television, Jamaican (and Caribbean) consciousness was heavily influenced by the early Hollywood images. As Keith Q. Warner points out, the new technology of cinema seduced Caribbean viewers in the 1960s and 70s: "From one end of the archipelago to the other, from Jamaica to Trinidad, the lure of the cinema – popularly referred to as 'pictures' or 'theatre' – was inescapable. It provided a relatively inexpensive activity for the masses, affording them a look at another world beyond the confines of the islands, and allowing them to submerge themselves in other adventures, albeit from a distance" (6). Westerns were fan favorites during those times and audiences (who Warner describes as largely male) soaked them up. He offers a possible explanation:

Westerns were dominated by men trying to carve out their turf, to establish their manhood through their quick draw and their overall toughness. They showed values that appealed to the spirit of adventure and fair play in the hearts of many of those cheering on the cowboy, the star boy who could not die – or in any event, not till the last reel . . . There was an air of 'triumph of the underdog' combined with 'might is right' that permeated many westerns, a tailor-made situation for a colonized citizen anxious to prove his mettle, if only subconsciously, against a colonial master. The western, par excellence, typified the struggle of the good guy versus the bad guy, and the

colonial filmgoer could identify with both elements as it suited his fancy. This duality of association explains the ability of the Caribbean viewer to identify with John Wayne leading his assault against native American Indians, who were . . . made in many instances to be the villains. (10, 11)

As showcased in *The Harder They Come*, Westerns were profoundly impactful on Jamaican popular imagination. Basically the original gunplay narrative, the Western fueled many a male imagination and plays an important role in unpacking these masculinity narratives.

So What?

A large portion of the masculinity narrative is based on violent identities. Gary T. Barker sees what this violent projection of manhood can do. His research quantifies the very real consequences of these so-called “fantasies” and he documents what he considers a public health issue in communities such as Jamaica where some of his research took place: “In much of the world, young men die earlier than young women and die more often than older men largely because they are trying to live up to certain models of manhood – they are dying to prove that they are ‘real men’ (2). More importantly, *Amnesty International* currently ranks Jamaica as a country with “one of the highest rates of violent crime in the *world*” (2, emphasis

added). This is a very real public security crisis but instead of garnering effective governmental intervention, it has become fodder for films.

The explosion of these violent Jamaican films is signaling that a different type of explosion is happening in the country and it needs serious attention; the films are highlighting a deeper trend happening in these communities. Because movies are small windows/microcosms into these worlds, they can reveal the type of masculinity that is valued and validated. Whether art is imitating life or life is imitating art, film can inform the making of people's identities. Like Patricia Hill Collins says,

Films and videos provide social scripts that show people appropriate gender ideology as well as how to behave toward one another. Despite the protests by defenders of the media who claim that sounds and images have little effect on consumers, the billions spent on advertising dollars suggests otherwise. Certainly images and representations do not determine behavior, but they do provide an important part of the interpretive context for explaining it. Social scripts suggest how to behave. (18)

She reminds us that "being given a script of how to behave as a Black man or woman in no ways means that one must follow it" (18), but for young people trying to construct a healthy identity under the barrage of visual choices in the global marketplace, sometimes imitation is the easiest choice.

Therefore, the increasing connection between hegemonic masculinity and violence should be of national (and global) concern. This connection is in no way exclusive to Jamaica, nor is it meant to imply that these are the only representations of violent (black) masculinity that are circulating in the world. Instead, this is a call to help young men and boys find alternative models of masculinity other than those foregrounded in these popular films. In this way, this project is a hopeful step toward beginning a dialogue of intervention and peace so that filmmakers, writers, musicians, public policy makers, educators, sociologists, etc. – everyone can be on board with looking for healthier ways to be a Jamaican man. As Alcaraz and Suárez explain:

Such an approach would make the construction of male identities fully visible and highlight the elements of dominant masculinity implied in the perpetration of violence, as well as illuminate the motivations and reasons men claim for resorting to violence. Such a reflective effort requires institutional support, a full national consciousness, and a significant level of social mobilization. (108)

Such work has historically fallen under the rubric of Masculinity Studies whose task is to challenge the privileged/unmarked identity of maleness. As a field, the general concern is to uproot the taken-for-granted “power, resources, and cultural authority” (Adams 2) that being a man can bring:

Focusing critical interrogation on men, patriarchy, and formations of masculinity, scholars in many disciplines have sought to denaturalize

[Simone] de Beauvoir's observation that "[A man never begins by presenting himself as an individual of a certain sex;] it goes without saying that he is a man," by demonstrating that masculinities are historically constructed, mutable, and contingent, and analyzing their many and widespread effects. Yet, as Bryce Traister emphasizes, these are demanding tasks. Because "masculinity has for so long stood as the transcendental anchor and guarantor of cultural authority and 'truth,' demonstrating its materiality, its 'constructedness,' requires an especially energetic rhetorical and critical insistence" (2000: 281). (Adams 2)

This "critical insistence" is what several Caribbean scholars have been participating in for the last several years. They have been invested in the work of making Caribbean male identities visible with some attention to Jamaica and violence specifically. Various projects that have focused specifically on deconstructing the layers of meaning wrapped up in masculinity began appearing in the 1990s. Some authors were seen as challenging the status quo while others were accused of trying to solidify it. Errol Miller is representative of the latter category because he argued that men had fallen behind women because they had lost their "traditional place" in the areas of home, school and the workplace (161). According to Miller, this meant that men were experiencing a new kind of marginalization and thereby were "at risk." Many critics took Miller to task, pointing out that his analysis did not challenge essentialist thinking, patriarchy or the construction of

masculinity itself as a learned set of behaviors (Barriteau, Lindsay, Chevannes 1999). Therefore, other critics began filling those gaps with more nuanced research. Barry Chevannes is one of the preeminent contributors to this complex research and he has written extensively about gender ideologies and Jamaican masculinity. He recognizes gender as a performance and considers the multiple influences on the socialization of boys and girls in their becoming adults. He also offers insightful critiques of heterosexism, homophobia and fatherhood. While his research on violence tends to be situated in family analyses, he still stands out as one of the more progressive voices in the field.

Large edited volumes with an overall focus on “gender” began to emerge in the late 1990s. They were also progressive, but of the few key collections published during this period, there are only a handful of essays on masculinity within them. Nevertheless, important collections to the overall field of Caribbean gender studies include Christine Barrow’s *Caribbean Portraits* from 1998 and *Children’s Rights: Caribbean Realities* from 2001, Patricia Mohammed’s *Gendered Realities* from 2002 and Eudine’s Barriteau’s *Confronting Power, Theorizing Gender* in 2003. In this collection of anthologies, Christine Barrow has an essay in *Caribbean Portraits* that challenges the structural functionalist notion that Caribbean men are completely marginal to family by stating that their symbolic position outside of the household did not mean that they were separate from or opposed to family. Although

acknowledging persistent challenges in family life, she reminds us that many Caribbean men regularly meet their responsibilities in ways that fall outside of stereotypical nuclear family norms. In this way, she also calls for a richer understanding of male identities. In *Children's Rights: Caribbean Realities*, Barry Chevannes discusses the importance of fatherhood to male identities, Christine Barrow takes on the male marginality thesis and Clement Branche discusses the danger violence has for boys in Jamaica. While this last article seems ideally suited for this project, Branche tends to spend more time summarizing the debates around "male privileging" than really giving any substantive critiques as to why these conditions exist in the first place. There is an acknowledgement that in their journey to adulthood, boys are challenged by "a world of *representation* and an identity of restricted masculinity that calls out . . . in terms of conflict, violence, sexuality, money and power" (95, emphasis added), but these representations are not discussed any further. However, the conclusion does suggest that paying attention to children's voices and socialization processes are key, an argument that is persuasive (95). The two essays explicitly focusing on maleness in *Confronting Power, Theorizing Gender* are preoccupied with challenging Miller's aforementioned male marginalization thesis more specifically (including Barriteau), so issues of violence are not really central to their arguments.

The topic of violence and masculinity gets more focused attention in a work focusing on the Spanish-speaking Caribbean – Rafael Ramírez's book

on Puerto Rican masculinities that was first published in English in 1999. He begins by unpacking the definitions of “machismo” and asserts that the uncritical recirculation of this ideology locks Latino men into a limited version of masculinity. Like Chevannes who published his ethnographic study *Learning To Be A Man* in 2001, Ramírez offers insightful critiques of hegemonic masculinity and pushes readers towards trying to envision a different way of being (a Puerto Rican) male. Linden Lewis is also part of this progressive movement. He edited a collection of essays on Caribbean gender and sexuality that was published in 2003. It includes four wonderful essays specifically about masculinity (including one on masculinity and power in Puerto Rico by Ramírez, another about how the streets socialize males by Chevannes and a deconstruction of Caribbean masculinity by Lewis himself). Ramírez’s and Chevannes’s contributions to this volume are extracts from the research that their books are based upon. Although they do not foreground violence specifically, they both discuss how power is attached to behaviors assigned to men/boys and how the contradictions of prevailing dominant masculine ideologies can have an adverse effect on male socialization in their respective communities. They argue that these ideologies often rest on subdued feelings of pain that men are expected to suppress and in this important way, I see their analyses converging with my own concerns in this project.

In 2004, an entire volume was dedicated to Caribbean masculinities. Edited by Rhoda Reddock, this collection lays important theoretical groundwork in the field and goes on to investigate the manifestations of masculinity in a variety of areas such as slavery, literature, calypso, art and education. But although these multidisciplinary popular culture analyses are there in the overall collection, the popular culture essays themselves are not really multidisciplinary treatments. This means that Paula Morgan and Kenneth Ramchand stick to looking at the representations of Caribbean masculinity in literary texts, Gordon Rohlehr stays focused on masculinity in a range of Trinidadian calypsos and Christopher Cozier sticks to his creative deconstruction of the messages that surround an everyday article of clothing for the Caribbean male – the shirt-jac. While each presents a fantastic analysis of their chosen texts, the texts are not compared to any other popular culture arena. On the other hand, my project attempts this multidisciplinary interconnectedness by pairing the various films alongside some literature, further contextualizing the interdisciplinarity with some discussion of music as well as newspaper articles.

The University of the West Indies's Centre [sic] for Gender and Development Studies does a good job at this multidisciplinary approach in their Working Paper Series. Three selections in particular contribute to the field of Caribbean masculinity studies. In 2001, Tara L. Atluri critiqued the way gender categories reinforce heterosexism and homophobia and how

violence generally surrounds homosexuality in the Caribbean. In 2004, Kelvin Quintyne analyzed the representations of black masculinity in four films – each one from a different country (South Africa, Martinique, Britain and Jamaica), three feature films and one documentary. He examines the common themes of poverty and oppression and how the black male protagonist in each film handles similar issues. He also argues that “real” black men are positioned as dangerous beings and that this stereotype results in oppressive and limiting options for black femininity, homosexuality as well as black men themselves. My research is in definite conversation with Quintyne’s work because we both challenge the dehumanizing effects of violence as perpetuated in popular culture, but instead of examining films from different countries, the filmic texts that I use are all from Jamaica. In this way, I can do a focused analysis to uncover trends in one country rather than engage in a possibly more superficial analysis of cultural differences between countries. Moreover, I include literary presentations alongside the films that I analyze to compare how these patriarchal images show up on the printed page. I further reference the Working Paper Series to mention that the third contribution to the area of masculinity studies is Linden Lewis’s 2005 publication which calls for a continued rethinking of the assumed markers of masculinity. I believe that the impact of popular films on identity formation is one area where the “markers of masculinity” are often taken for granted. While violence is mentioned in some places in the aforementioned corpus of Caribbean

masculinity studies (and most often in the context of domestic violence), the role of violent popular culture images is never really examined at length (outside of Quintyne's work). More importantly, there is no significant connection made between guns, violence and masculinity in the field of Humanities. Gun violence tends to be talked about in sociological texts that tackle issues surrounding the existence of crime, delinquency or gangs (Moser, Harriott, Deosaran). But it is a large part of these part of these film and literary texts. Therefore, my project offers a small bridge between the disciplines by foregrounding literary and filmic texts, while also considering the wider socio-political implications.

Imani Tafari-Ama's 2006 book is a part of this bridge because she presents an extensive treatment of the gendered effects of violence on one particular Kingston community and does a good job at blending first-person narratives with historical data and some popular culture material such as dancehall music. She focuses on how and why the context of disadvantage plays out on the bodies of both men and women, in what she calls "an intergenerational study of violence and sexual politics" (17) that critiques hegemonic masculinity. Although she does not include any novels, she ends with a range of recommendations to stem the violence, including the use of "cultural communications" which she defines as "the use of media like music, dance, theatre, poetry, etc, as teaching tools on an individual level, and ultimately as essential tools for community-wide mobilization" [sic] (371).

She then outlines specific ideas for various constituencies from politicians and security forces to the tourist sector, media, community and even Rastafari. She hopes to create dialogue, and my approach is an extension of that kind of initiative.

In terms of extending the dialogue, there seems to be a larger body of work about African American representations of masculinity in popular culture by African American researchers. But given that the images of black masculinity are globally represented by similar tropes and people of African descent face similar challenges around the world, these texts provide useful insights for Caribbean masculinities (see for example Caster, Hill Collins, hooks, Richardson and Tucker).

Now What?

My analysis of these themes will be structured as follows:

Chapter 1 begins with the cult classic of Perry Henzell's 1972 film *The Harder They Come* and traces how the film invests the viewer with a particular way of looking at what constitutes a "real/reel" man.

Chapter 2 looks at the 1980 novel version of *The Harder They Come* by Michael Thelwell and how the novelization process in this particular instance was a reversal of the usual path of novel-into-film. I discuss the differences between the novel and the film, and look at what Thelwell is and is not able to do given the format of written text. I then compare this novel to Garfield

Ellis's 2005 novel entitled *For Nothing At All* and discuss the importance of community in the shaping of healthy identities.

Chapter 3 turns back to film, looking at the *Third World Cop* (1999) and *Shottas* (2002) as filmic examples of what "reel" men do. In each I discuss how the films celebrate hegemonic masculinity as shaped through gun power. They attempt to convince viewers that this model of masculinity is ideal, but in reality only reinforce images of the black brute and thus extend the trajectory of the minstrel tradition.

Chapter 4 examines *Born Fi' Dead: A Journey through the Yardie Underworld* (1998) by Laurie Gunst, a white participant-observer who chronicles the violence in Jamaica and New York from the "sufferers" point of view. Her role as outsider and honorary insider complicates this ethnographic travelogue and while she hopes to break the silence surrounding much of the gang wars and political violence, the most lasting images from the book continue to frame the black Jamaican male as a menacing violent threat.

CHAPTER ONE

How Do I Look?

Westerns, gangster films and reggae/dancehall culture all have one thing in common. Men play primary roles. Although it may seem like an obvious observation, male bodies and behaviors are part of the very definition of each genre. Each distinctively centers the images of and gives viewers lessons about how men should look and behave. These lessons include implicit scripts about how women should look and behave as well, but this study shines a light on the men because masculinity is the privileged, often unexamined, identity and in the face of hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy, that is where the power lies. In recognizing that all masculinities are not the same, I specifically am shining a light on images of men who are often socially discounted, disenfranchised, and marginalized. In other words, I am analyzing the representations of Afro-Caribbean men in popular Jamaican films.

Decoding the messages embedded in these particular representations reveals new significance about masculinity. This is especially important given that the cinema was a new technology seducing Caribbean viewers in the 1960s and 70s. As Keith Q. Warner points out, "From one end of the archipelago to the other, from Jamaica to Trinidad, the lure of the cinema – popularly referred to as 'pictures' or 'theatre' – was inescapable. It provided a

relatively inexpensive activity for the masses, affording them a look at another world beyond the confines of the islands, and allowing them to submerge themselves in other adventures, albeit from a distance” (6). Westerns were fan favorites during those times and audiences (who Warner describes as largely male) soaked them up.

The most popularized images of manhood seen in these films were constructed around elements from the aforementioned genres – the Western, (as well as gangster film and reggae/dancehall culture). While each genre has its own set of formulaic rules that make it distinct from one another, the genres are ultimately bound together by the fact that they are genres that center their gaze on men’s bodies and constructed behaviors – a gaze that relies heavily on the gendered dynamics of men’s *looking*. In these fictive realities, men are looking at each other, at women and the constructed world around them. More importantly, these constructions rely heavily on us (the audience) looking at them (the men “performing”) in specific gendered ways. I argue that if we take the cultural models or products of the Western, the gangster film, and reggae/dancehall culture, films such as *The Harder They Come*, and its later translations *Third World Cop*, *Shottas* and *Rude Boy* become films about mythic masculinity and the gendered nature of how real/reel men look on screen and in real life. The unique structures of these models are reproduced in these films and intersect in ways to produce a type of violent masculinity that is played out not just on the screen. More importantly, the

tremendous local and international reception of *The Harder They Come* makes close analysis of this “cult classic” a necessary project in any attempts to understand the direction of contemporary Caribbean “texts.”

The Harder They Come as Revised Western

Myths help create the truths that people live by. They help us make sense of the world and create seductive archetypes. Perry Henzell’s 1972 film *The Harder They Come* functions on this mythic level in how it depicts effective/hegemonic masculinity. We as audience are drawn into a world of violent justice through the hero Ivanhoe Martin, whose story is based on the real-life exploits of Jamaican criminal Ivanhoe “Rhygin” Martin who achieved fame in the 1940s. The film’s Ivan is transformed from awkward country boy into a magnificent sharp-shooting community folk hero as he becomes a recording artist, ganja trader, and finally a fugitive of the law after killing several police officers. Considered more of a social bandit than rogue criminal, he gains legendary status by eluding police capture with the help of the community for several weeks until a final showdown at the film’s end where he is gunned down in a hail of bullets. Even in his final scenes, the audience secretly hopes for our hero Ivan to escape victoriously one last time. But more than just creating investment in a main character, this film creates an investment in a particular way of looking. We are invested in Ivan’s form of masculinity because it is presented as a revised Western. By the final

sequence we believe that there is something oddly justifiable about his way of looking at the world. The film enacts this transformation through various depictions of Ivan's "looking" and in the end we see that it is ultimately a film about the dynamics between masculinity, violence and the gendered nature of men (along with women and children) looking at what makes a "real/reel man." Close analysis of several key scenes will reveal precisely how this is done.

Setting the Stage

The film begins with a long shot of headless coconut trees along a country road that borders the misty sea. A bus heading to Kingston and Ocho Rios winds its way along the road and the landscape slowly changes from the open countryside to a bustling city with sharper colors, more people both on and off the bus, more houses and billboards that promise a "better life" through the maze of a million telephone wires. On its journey into town, the camera alternates tracking shots of the bus and an oncoming truck. The bus moves across the screen from left to right and the truck is quickly approaching from the other way, moving from right to left. After quick jump cuts from bus to truck to bus to truck, both vehicles meet head-to-head on a narrow bridge unable to pass one another and both drivers blow their horns. One man seated on the bus even tells the driver *not* to move. The country and city literally come to an impasse, signaling that this is not going to be a

smooth transition and that the country people cannot be dismissed or moved so easily. Although we never find out which vehicle moved first, the next cut shows the bus making its way into town to drop off passengers, giving the country people on the bus an air of unstoppable determination. This determination is underlined by the song “You Can Get it if you Really Want,” (sung by popular reggae artist Jimmy Cliff, who plays Ivan), that accompanies the bus on its journey, taking up more sound space than the dialogue in these opening frames. We first meet our hero/protagonist Ivan at this impasse with the truck, as he sits in the back of the crowded bus admiringly taking a green mango out of a paper bag on his lap. Even though he tells the same man who told the driver not to move that he is taking it for his mother (and basically not trying to eat it anytime soon), the fact that it is a green mango not fully ripened adds to the sense that Ivan is in transition. He is still country green and not quite ripened for city life, looking only at innocent mangoes. Nevertheless, the tracking shots of the bus in motion become the catalyst and metaphor for his slow ripening.

We accompany him as he takes in this new world. Through a series of close-ups of him peering through the bus windows onto this new landscape, we see him looking and absorbing everything passing by as if watching a movie of his own. The soundtrack continues to play “You Can Get it if You Really Want” as Ivan is riveted by a caramel colored man driving a convertible Mustang with two caramel colored women behind the bus. This is

the “good life” personified and Ivan continues to look. The tight close-up of his grinning face turned around in his seat to look backwards out of a visibly dirty bus window amplifies his position as on-looker. He is still outsider and unable to keep up with this image of masculine “cool” – one woman in the front passenger seat, one woman in the back, the male driver with sunglasses and a perfectly round afro that is impervious to the wind that ripples the ladies’ stylish red clothes. The Mustang is itself the horse of the urban cowboy. Ivan points, nods and waves in an effort to get the driver’s attention through the window, but he is ignored. A long tracking shot of the car behind the bus reveals from a low angle that Ivan is sitting next to a woman with a head scarf. Although she is not traveling with him, the bus window tightly frames their bodies and he is crowded against her like a child unable to spread his arms across the back of the seats, like the woman in the Mustang’s back seat. The colors in the bus’s interior are dark and lend to an air of staleness that is in direct contrast to the light color of the Mustang and its top-down open-air of independent mobility. Although they are going in the same direction, Mr. Mustang is clearly ahead. As the car cuts from behind the bus to pass, Ivan continues to grin and follow its motion. The camera pans to follow his gaze and the steady close-up of his profile with the world whizzing by outside the bus window positions Ivan in a state of looking. However, this looking is similar to that of a school child who still has lots to learn. The last shot before he gets off in town is a medium shot of a bus (possibly his) that

has a manufacturer or company name on its side and rear panels that is in such small script it could generally be missed. The letters spell out “Fascination” and Ivan literally steps out from behind this rear panel burdened with packages into new landscape. Fascination along with a healthy dose of economic necessity has brought him (and countless others) to Kingston in search of a “better life.” It is here that his ripening begins.

The medium and close-up shots on the bus as he sat in his seat are now contrasted with long shots of bustling activity all around him. Although we can now see his whole body, he is clearly out of place in this new environment. The frame is full of the blurry motion of cars, buses, pedestrians and bicycles, along with multiple fruit stands, bus stands and noise levels that add to this new pace. Like Ivan, we are overwhelmed with all there is to see and uncertain about where to focus first; our looking is still from an outsider’s perspective. As if to say it is all too much, one of Ivan’s modestly wrapped brown paper packages falls in the street before the wheels of a push-cart of a city boy named Winston. Like the impasse between the bus and the truck on the bridge, country and city boys meet here head-to-head.

Winston impatiently shouts at Ivan to move out of the way but when Ivan responds with a question about how to get to his mother’s address, Winston asks if he has money. He offers to help Ivan carry his packages for a fee and Ivan helps him push his cart. Winston reminds Ivan of one of the cardinal city rules when he says “With money you can do anything, man.”

This is a hard learned lesson after Winston convinces Ivan that a stranger across the street in a bus stand owes him money. When Ivan crosses the busy street to collect the alleged debt, Winston runs off with all of his possessions. Although Winston is only pushing the cart on foot and could theoretically be caught (especially since he is moving *up* a slight hill), Ivan is out of place in this new landscape and like the small child we met on the back of the bus, he is unable to navigate the frantic traffic to cross the street and catch him. The frame is filled with flying buses, cars, trucks and people. Everything around Ivan is moving so quickly that he cannot even step off of the sidewalk and he is once again positioned as an outsider and on-looker. The camera cuts between medium shots of him intermittently seen through traffic blur standing helplessly in the bus stand, and Winston's back running uphill and away with his things. This scene is important because it creates the blank canvas vulnerability upon which constructions of his maleness will be later painted. Still a green mango, Ivan is stripped of his belongings and essentially a youngster again. In this state it makes perfect sense that he would make his way to his mother's home. As part of this new blankness, going to his mother is another key scene because it introduces the critical elements that will be the beginning of his new adult male identity.

A long shot of Ivan on his way to his mother's door captures his high-water pants, simple knit top and tiny-brimmed hat cocked to the side. He passes a group of men at a table playing dominoes and the most boisterous

man confirms that Miss Daisy (Ivan's mother) lives just past where they are standing. Once inside Miss Daisy's home, we can tell that Ivan has essentially outgrown his mother's space. The room is small and crowded with a bare light bulb, and the medium and close-up shots of their bodies claustrophobically fill the frame. He stands over her while she sits and listens to the news of her mother's death and funeral – both of which she is surprised and naturally dismayed to hear. But because there is not enough space in the frame to hold them both, Ivan has to leave. When it is clear that he is not going back to the country as she suggests, she gives him the name of a preacher who she says can help him since he clearly knows no one else in town. The simple wooden door barely opens all the way as he squeezes his way out, leaving her in this domestic womb-sphere to essentially be reborn into a city version of himself.

He walks back down the dark alley way (an odd birth canal) and stops by the domino game where he had just asked for directions. The same boisterous man, Jose, is clearly winning as the camera zooms in on his raking all the dominos to his chest. The other three men around the table are shadowy figures who are out of focus and without real lines, letting us know that Jose is a key figurehead. More importantly, Jose sits at the card table with his back facing Miss Daisy's house so Ivan's rebirth will definitely be a break from the path she has previously laid out for him. He is not going to turn to the man that she suggested he go to, but instead look for his own male role

model. As Ivan lingers by the card table staring at Jose and his movements, it is clear that this is the person that Ivan wants to follow. Similar to his looking at Mr. Mustang out of the bus window, he sees an image of masculinity in Jose that he wants to emulate. Jump cuts between close-ups of black dominos on the card table to medium shots of Jose's focused concentration and occasional mutterings, Jose asks Ivan if he found his mother all right and if he just came from the country. Like the metaphorical child that we know he is in this moment, Ivan lingers thinking of the appropriate thing to say to make a connection. When he finally asks Jose if he could take him to the local cinema that he read about, The Rialto, Jose teases him about knowing these city spots having just arrived. It was nevertheless the perfect ice-breaker because Jose agrees and they go. Ivan is now part of a group of men who help to shape his ideas of what it means to be a "real man" since he is clearly not interested in following the model of masculinity his mother recommended in the preacher. The scene at The Rialto is an important moment in this shaping as well as in this matrix of gendered looking. It is also a moment that is revisited throughout the film and therefore necessary to analyze in close detail.

There are several cues that this is more than a Jamaican good guy/bad guy action movie. Most interestingly, we as audience wind up siding with the supposed "bad" guy criminals who are simply struggling against institutionalized classism and racism. Ivan begins as an innocent country boy who later turns into a man wanted by the police for several police murders.

However, he is lauded by the community as something of a folk hero who is seen as essentially suffering for the people. In fact, the community helps to hide him for several weeks from the police, a dynamic that we will return to later on. What is important right now is that he winds up becoming a cowboy of sorts, out to right the wrongs of the people. But remember he is still that green mango who has just left his mother's house. His maturity is charted along key "masculinizing" events that I argue center on this notion of looking. Therefore, it makes perfect sense that when Jose gets up from the domino game to take Ivan to the movies, the very next frame transports us into a scene from the Spaghetti Western *Django*. Because this particular Western is a recurring motif in the overall film, I will pause to give a brief summary of the genre itself.

Spaghetti Westerns

The term "Spaghetti Western" was a pejorative term coined by American critics for Westerns made by European directors in Europe (primarily Italy and Spain) during the 1960s and 1970s. Although now a descriptive term that implies a certain level of respect for the genre, these Westerns were European interpretations of American Westerns and originally scoffed at as being "not at all like the real thing" (Frayling x). Spaghetti Westerns did reinterpret many of the American Western formulas and these unique differences make Perry Henzell's choice to make a European-made Western the central motif of Jamaican masculinity very telling. An extended

quote from Tom Betts's Foreword to Thomas Weisser's book highlights the distinguishing features that can better explain Henzell's choice:

For starters, Spaghetti Westerns deal primarily with the Mexican border region of the American Southwest. A viewer hears the wind blowing across the hot desert sands. He can feel the heat rising from these same sands, and he is captured by the barren landscape sprawling before him. . . .

The Spaghetti directors then created the characters to match this rugged landscape. These are rough men; men who, like the landscape, didn't give an inch. *Only the fittest survived in this hell. . . . These are faces that have withstood the test of the land and have survived.* It's obvious that these people could only be controlled by raw, brutal strength. And each could be defeated only by a man who was equally strong, but who used his brains to tip the scales in his favor.

This is not a world of black and white. This is a world of black and gray. . . . The villain in a Spaghetti Western is made to suffer the same type of penalty that he inflicted upon others, but *from an avenging angel who could be just as evil.*

This angel usually had a meaningless name . . . or no name at all. The avenging angel wasn't trying to right the villain's wrongs, or save the townspeople, or even rescue the heroine. *He was out to make a profit for himself;* therefore, he received his reward, not with a kiss or a

handshake, but usually with a saddlebag full of dollars or a strongbox brimming with treasure. The Spaghetti Western is the epitome of the ME generation watching a ME hero.

The Spaghetti hero also had the best wardrobe in all of filmdom. He was usually dressed in style, wearing anything from cavalry outfits, frock coats, dusters, and ponchos to gambling outfits and flat-brimmed hats. Weapons were also his specialty. . . . Even if he were captured, you knew he would somehow escape and turn the tables on his enemy. James Bond in the Wild West.

I've purposely saved the best ingredient for last: the music. When you ask fans of the genre what initially caught their attention, the majority will say the 'musical score.' . . . Yes, they did use bells, whips, spurs, etc., but these were not predominant, only background props used as percussion instruments to help set a mood. Even without these props the Italian composers are heads above American composers. . . .

Many times, I've watched poor Spaghetti Westerns just to hear the soundtrack. It is the most captivating music ever written for film. (xi, xii, emphasis added)

Clearly Tom Betts is a Spaghetti Western fan with a clear musical preference. However, his list of the main ingredients that are found in Spaghetti Westerns ("the landscape, the supporting players, the main characters, the wardrobe and weapons, [and] the music") provide useful tools for analyzing this

Jamaican filmic space. More importantly, his list reveals why Henzell's film can be seen as invoking tropes from these European Westerns.

First, landscape is a huge issue in *The Harder They Come*. Jamaica is more geographically similar to the hot Mexican-like border regions of Spaghetti Westerns than to the frontier-spaces in American Westerns. Moreover, Jamaica holds a history of having rugged landscape against which black bodies were sacrificed in the colonial projects of trying to tame both the land and the enslaved people, bringing me to the second point of characters.

I cannot help but think of the legendary Maroons when Betts says "Only the fittest survived in this hell. . . . These are faces that have withstood the test of the land and have survived." [note that the novelization of the film casts Ivan's ancestors as Maroons] Ivan is in the concrete hell of Kingston looking to withstand the tests of this new land and it is indeed populated by a set of memorable (and predominantly male) characters. He attaches himself to "rough men" (such as Jose) who don't "give an inch" and the film traces his transformation into an avenging angel of sorts who (as we will see) is definitely "out to make a profit for himself."

Betts's third point about Spaghetti Westerns' showcasing wardrobes and weapons is particularly apropos because wardrobe and weapons are also important accessories with parallel significance in *The Harder They Come*. In fact, Ivan's wardrobe and weapons become essential masculine features and part of his development into a "reel" man. This makes sense in light of the

importance of these accessories in both American and European Westerns. As Lee Clark Mitchell points out, the cowboy “depends more on specialized garb than almost any other modern worker” and this conventional dress has “become a sort of language, signaling moral and emotional stature (the excess of two guns versus the restraint of one, or the contrasting claims made by fringe, silk, leather, and silver). . . . all the way up and down, the cowboy’s costume invites and deflects our gaze” (178). As mentioned in the beginning, male bodies are on center stage and all Westerns create a stylized performance of that centering. The clothes that are on the male body become just as important as the body itself because they help audience attention to linger even longer on a body now framed by “fringe, silk, [or] leather.” Clark Mitchell agrees: “Not only are we allowed to gaze at men in Westerns, this gaze forms such an essential aspect of the genre that it seems covertly about just that: *looking at men*” (177, emphasis added). As Ivan makes his transformation, we will see that his wardrobe definitely signals his heroic shift.

 Betts’s final point about the music of Spaghetti Westerns is especially telling because *The Harder They Come* is credited with helping to thrust reggae music onto an international scene. Island Records founder Chris Blackwell has an interview on the 30th anniversary DVD where he describes the release of *The Harder They Come* and Bob Marley’s album *Catch a Fire* a year later as a “one-two punch.” Prakash Younger describes the powerful combination:

In the 1970s two extramusical events are credited with making reggae more than a local form. The first was Chris Blackwell's signing of Bob Marley and the Wailers to Island Records in 1970. . . . The second event . . . was the unprecedented success of *The Harder They Come*, which became a cult film in metropolitan centers like New York and London at the exact moment at which its star Jimmy Cliff was at his peak as a singer and reggae itself had achieved a complex, synthetic form. (53)

Jimmy Cliff plays Ivan and also wrote and sang several original songs for the film's soundtrack. Therefore, the film is set in a key moment in reggae's history while it simultaneously helps to lay the foundation for a milestone in reggae's history. Given this global legacy that straddles musical fiction and reality, combined with reggae's importance to Jamaica and its working class, I will return to how music operates in the film in a later section. For now, however, it is enough to recognize that an elevated soundtrack that goes beyond just "props" and "percussion" is yet another connection that *The Harder They Come* shares with the Spaghetti Western.

Looking back at Betts's list then, it is clear that Henzell reconstructs the landscape, characters, wardrobes, weapons and music of Spaghetti Westerns into a Jamaican narrative. What matters most about this decision is that all Westerns explicitly construct mythic/heroic masculinity in a particular way. However, the Spaghetti Western's twist on making the clean-cut and honest (white) hero of the American Western an "avenging angel who can be just as

evil” is an interesting departure and more interesting model to center in a film set in 1970s Kingston. With the history of political violence and back-stabbing taking place in Jamaica during this time, the avenging angel seems to be coming to right the wrongs of an imbalanced and corrupt society. Because Spaghetti Westerns have been described as “morally vacant” and “violence-laden films of the 1970s” (Clark Mitchell 183), it gives another nod to this morally vacant, violence-laden period of Jamaican history. Therefore if Ivan is that avenging angel, his journey is a commentary on masculinity as well as the nation’s health (not to mention that the film itself was seen as an example of resistance in and of itself because it was the first major motion picture that showcased the experience of everyday Jamaican people in their own language). So if we have established that the overall film is somewhat of a revised Spaghetti Western, it is important to turn back to the actual clip shown in the scene at The Rialto.

“So you want to go to The Rialto.”

Immediately after Jose stands from the domino table to take Ivan to The Rialto, the scene cuts to a clip from the Spaghetti Western *Django*, the film that is playing in The Rialto that night. Released in 1966 from director Sergio Corbucci, *Django* is named after the film’s hero who is played by Franco Nero. The real-life back-story is that Corbucci got his hero’s name from a jazz guitarist named Django Reinhardt who was badly burned in a fire but able to

re-emerge as a better guitarist after an 18-month recovery (Hughes 59). In the film, Django's hands are crushed by one of the enemy factions, but he is still able to exact revenge on everyone in the final showdown. Ivan is also wounded in the final showdown of *The Harder They Come*, so this idea of a wounded hero is important. However, we must first look at the short sequence that Henzell chooses to include here from the ninety-minute film.

The screen they are watching (and subsequently the one we are watching in a double case of looking) is a sepia toned mud pit. Most Spaghetti Westerns are set in sun-bleached desert towns so this "rain-sodden" "quagmire" is an interesting departure (especially considering how this landscape perhaps spoke to a Jamaican reality better than a dusty desert-landscape). There are a few rudimentary wooden buildings surrounding the brownish mud that is foregrounded in the frame and there is a small figure in the center of the frame. We slowly advance from a long shot to a slow zoom in on Django crouched down behind an enormous fallen tree trunk stripped of leaves and weathered pale. We are positioned behind him, only able to see his long black Union army coat and black hat that hides his face from our full view. Oddly, there is a coffin in the mud next to him that is also concealed by the tree and he is peeking out from behind one of the aged knobby limbs. Immediately positioned behind the hero, we recognize that we as audience are on this man's side. He is the only living thing we immediately see in this ghost town and he is on center stage for us to look at. As Lee Clark Mitchell

notes, “. . . the body of the Western hero, [is] situated always at center frame” (177) and here Django sits waiting for some impending action to begin. The scene cuts to a long shot of four or five men advancing towards him on the horizon, then cuts back to Django’s hat, coat and back, then a medium close-up of his profile in waiting. Seeing his rugged face now confirms that he is indeed our hero. Clark Mitchell reminds us that, “. . . Western stars have been celebrated for their physical attractiveness – for clear eyes, strong chins, handsome faces, and virile bodies over which the camera lingers. . .” (177). The scene then cuts to a close-up of two black male faces positioned on the right of the screen and enveloped in darkness. Only their faces are lit with the bright lights from The Rialto movie screen that they are watching with rapt attention. Shining on them from the left of the frame, light glints off of the sunglasses and gold tooth of the older man in the foreground, as well as off of the faces of other black men and boys in a series of tight close-ups. We then jump back to *Django* with a medium shot of the enemy’s back (one man’s hat, scarf and coat) as four men come into view approaching the fallen tree where our hero waits. Cut back to Django’s profile and then to a full shot of approximately fourteen men and four or five horses walking towards the camera. They all have on blood-red hoods that cover their entire faces except for two eye-holes, and some wear their hoods under their hats. The bright red stands in sharp contrast with the drab surroundings and seems to signify a violent history (as the story reveals that these are Ku Klux Klansmen) or

perhaps a foreshadowing of their own blood that will soon spill. The camera pans to reveal more red-hooded Klansmen advancing and the tension mounts as Django is clearly outnumbered. More jump-cuts between the movie and close-ups of audience members, including Ivan and Jose watching with smiles on their faces – Jose is also wearing sunglasses and holding a cigarette. After a cutting to a close-up of the same older man with the gold tooth (who now has his sunglasses off) yelling at the screen, we switch to a shot of Jose turning in his seat to say “Shut your mouth! You think hero can die ‘til the last reel?” A medium shot of him repeating this lesson to Ivan underscores the power of the hero.

Immediately afterwards we cut back to the movie with Django rising up from behind the tree with a huge belt-feed machine gun that he has pulled out of the coffin that was sitting next to him. This is a low-angled shot and Django’s profile fills the frame so much so that the top of his hat is cut off. He is standing fully erect shooting at the enemy and from this side view the cannon-shaped barrel of his enormous machine gun resembles a fully erect penis. He has now risen out of the mud to become fully male and from this position with the biggest gun on screen, he is able to kill every last Klansman.

The important lesson here is that a big gun helps a man to essentially become male and thereby actualize his true identity. More importantly, the trope of the Western showdown confirms what Arjet sees as a central truth to gunplay films: “nothing that a man has – not his possessions, not his family,

not his power – is truly his unless he can defend it in gun combat with other men” (129). So in the final segments that we see of *Django*, jump cuts alternate between Klansmen falling amidst smoke both individually and in groups, and the black (predominantly male) audience cheering at their slaughter. One particularly telling shot is a tight close-up of the cherubic face of a very young boy smiling at the light coming from what we understand him to be watching. In this moment Henzell seems to acknowledge the powerful influence that Westerns have on shaping young male identities – an idea that is underscored by the next shot of Jose and Ivan still grinning in their seats, with Jose’s sunglasses and teeth shining in the theater darkness, and then an immediate cut to pinball machine sounds and a close-up on the glowing word of “FUN” then an image of a man on a motorcycle and then the word “FAIR” – the other half of the sign. Keith Warner explains some of the general Caribbean fascination with Westerns in this way:

Westerns were dominated by men trying to carve out their turf, to establish their manhood through their quick draw and their overall toughness. They showed values that appealed to the spirit of adventure and fair play in the hearts of many of those cheering on the cowboy, *the star boy who could not die* – or in any event, *not till the last reel . . .*

There was an air of ‘triumph of the underdog’ combined with ‘might is right’ that permeated many westerns, a tailor-made situation for a

colonized citizen anxious to prove *his* mettle, if only subconsciously, against a colonial master. The western . . . typified the struggle of the good guy versus the bad guy, and the colonial filmgoer could identify with both elements as it suited *his* fancy. (10, 11, emphasis added)

Warner clearly makes allusion to the Django clip in The Rialto scene from *The Harder They Come*, but for me I feel like it is important to remember that the “colonized citizen” and the “colonial filmgoer” are gendered male. This is a very specific experience that even Warner acknowledges tended not to be mimicked in the same way by women. Therefore, we are back to this idea of how “reel” men look.

Guns, Gyals and Gas Guzzlers

Westerns celebrate a certain type of “reel” masculinity as “real” masculinity. The film prescription comes to life in the silver screen cowboys who are tough, ruggedly resilient, independent loners who are the envy of all men and desired by all women. The conventions of the genre require that their bodies not only be displayed on center stage, but interestingly that their bodies be beaten and then triumphantly healed. These “beating and recovery” sequences are hallmarks of the Western and required proof of the hero’s manliness, his rugged individualism (Clark Mitchell 183). Lee Clark Mitchell explains that “Violence in the Western . . . is less means than end in itself – less a matter of violating another than of constituting one’s physical

self as a male. The purpose is less defeat or destruction than . . . display” (181). He continues by highlighting the paradox inherent in these fighting trials when he says:

. . . Westerns treat the hero as a rubber doll, something to be wrenched and contorted so that we can then watch him magically recover his shape. . . . The whole dramatic process reveals how the cherished image of masculinity we had dismissed as simply learned behavior is in fact a resilient, vital, biological process. Stretching of the body proves the body’s natural essence, and all the leather, spurs, chaps, pistols, handkerchiefs, and hats may now be excused as dead talismans. . . . The compensatory satisfaction they offer is no longer really necessary since the physique they disguise has revealed itself as unmistakably male.

Yet the contradiction of the Western is that masculinity is always more than physical . . . (189)

As a Jamaican Western, *The Harder They Come* validates this premise that masculinity is more than physical in three primary ways: by highlighting certain modes of transportation, the use of firearms, and the positioning of women.

Gas Guzzlers and Horse-Power

If we remember when Ivan was watching the Mustang out of the back bus window with admiration and possible envy, it would be no surprise that cars and other automotive vehicles would play an important role in the making of a reel/real cow-bwoy. I use “bwoy” here to connote the Jamaican patois saying of “boy” and to signify the Jamaican twist on the Western that Henzell’s film produces. One such twist is that the cowboy’s traditional horse is re-imagined in the film as a car (and sometimes motorcycle) giving new meaning and an ironic twist to the term “horsepower.” Just as the horse is a key piece of the cowboy image, three specific scenes from the film illustrate how cars in particular play a similar symbolic role for Ivan and his cow-bwoy identity.

We last saw Ivan at the beginning of his ripening going to the “Fun Fair” with Jose and his male companions after having just watched *Django*. Jose inducts Ivan into a giddy world of city nightlife as he leads him through a maze of rooms pulsing with music, drinking, smoking and gambling, all while introducing him to men and women along the way. After Jose sits Ivan down at a card game to try what Jose calls his “beginner’s luck,” we next see Ivan the following morning sleeping in a bus stand. We can only guess how his beginner’s luck has turned out and what happened after that card game, but he is clearly still that green mango from the original bus ride. As he sleeps huddled on a bench at the bus stop, (linking him back to the original bus again), we see he has neither possessions nor the hat he was wearing the

night before. He is rudely awakened by a wave of water splashed up from a car speeding through a puddle of rain in the street. Cars are literally passing Ivan by and leaving him in their wake, reminding us that he is still finding his way. After he has spent the day begging for work and trolling for food, night falls and we come to our first key car scene.

Scene One

The scene opens with a full shot of a white convertible sitting under a hotel canopy at night – the car is in the left of the frame while a doorman stands by glass doors up three steps in the right of the frame. There are heavy shadows everywhere which are only broken up by the glow shining through two hotel windows next to the doorman, a series of overhead canister spotlights that hang like stars or party lanterns and the glinty outline of a white car with its top down and lights off. When the car turns on its headlights, the wet asphalt shines even brighter than the surrounding lights. Sparkle and shine are all around, giving off an air of opulence with the white lights, white car and white uniform of the doorman. Ivan begins to enter from the right side of the screen. Literally a shadowy figure emerging from even darker shadows, he is in the car's direct path and could be run over by this symbol of success if he does not move. As he approaches the driver's side (which is on the left-hand side and therefore signifying a foreign car), the automatic roof begins to close.

A low-angle shot from the passenger's seat gives us a profile close-up of the driver's head and shoulders leaning back on what looks like white leather seats. The seat back is on the left and part of his windshield and steering wheel close the frame on the right, with two of the overhead canister lights above. He is a well-shaven caramel-colored man in a patterned shirt staring straight ahead as Ivan approaches from the right of the frame. The piece of windshield on that right side obscures Ivan's head as he walks up to the car and we can see from the skin showing at the top of Ivan's shirt that there is a noticeable color difference between them. Ivan bends down to ask if he could get ten cents for watching his car and his face comes into full view, still shot from this low angle positioning him still outside of the car. "You got ten cents master? I was watching your car while you was away." The driver merely turns his head to the left without lifting it off the headrest as Ivan crouches lower to the driver's window. Although Ivan's face comes into full focus while the driver's body is in more of a shallow focus, Ivan looks small framed by the windshield, headrest and driver still on headrest. "No man, the steward always look after my car, man" the driver posits. "He's not here all the time" Ivan insists. As Ivan tries to reason a shadow slowly starts to creep over the car's interior.

The convertible roof that had begun to close when Ivan ran up now enters the frame from the top left corner as a mechanical hinge. Slowly the shadow spreads across the car seats and one of the two canister lights

overhead is obscured as the roof creeps into place. Ivan's head looks squeezed between the shadow of the windshield and car frame and the shadow of the closing roof almost as though he is caught in between the jaws of an alligator. When the driver says "If you want ten cents, go beg the steward" the roof is completely closed and Ivan is now out of focus, leaving the side of the driver's face and head rest in sharp close-up in the car's now dark interior. Ivan stands up and although his body is out of focus, we can see his tattered yellow shirt that he has had on since his arrival in Kingston in sharp contrast to the crisp multi-colored patterns of the driver's shirt. Mr. Convertible now lifts his head off of the headrest in dismissal, looks away from Ivan to his dashboard and starts his engine. There is no room for Ivan in this sealed off image. The closing roof symbolically blocks access and Ivan is once again on the outside looking into a frame that he does not fit. Even part of Ivan's head is cut off by the car's roof and windshield. On his journey from the country he stared at Mr. Mustang from the back of the bus, and now he is left staring at Mr. Convertible in this moment. Even more interesting, both of the vehicles Ivan gawks at are white or light-colored, they both are convertibles and they both are left-hand drives. Additionally, since both drivers are "colored" Jamaicans, Henzell draws our attention to the intersection of race and class on the island as well, especially at this historical time. Both Ivan and these drivers are black men, but the light brown men

clearly have it better and lead the more valued life, a point we will return to again later.

As the car leaves the frame with a medium shot of Ivan standing still looking down at the car, we only see the roof slide from left to right across Ivan's waist as Mr. Convertible drives away. However, the motion of the moving roof ultimately cuts Ivan at the waist as he stands on the side watching the car leave (as on-looker), a gesture of symbolic castration. Incidentally, when the car is fully gone, the same medium shot captures Ivan standing in the foreground, a young black man in a formal blue uniform waiting by the glass hotel doors in the background and the previous doorman, in white hat and uniform, walking in from the left frame to confront Ivan. All three men are the same complexion, another subtle commentary on the intersections of race and class, but Ivan is still out of place in this setting and the doorman in white shoos him away like a stray dog. He walks off screen, moving from right to left to return to the shadows, while Mr. Convertible had previously left the frame moving from left to right. Because Ivan is literally going in the opposite direction of this important motif, we can be sure that he is still ripening.

Scene Two

With nowhere else to turn, Ivan does eventually wind up going to the preacher his mother recommended on his first night. After a close-up of Ivan

peeking through the window slats of Preacher's night-time service, we cut to a daytime shot of a renewed Ivan in a different shirt and a yellow apple-jack hat cocked to the side. He is working alongside an older man (named Longa) in a dark makeshift shop with car parts and other indeterminable metal junk all around them. The shop is in the crowded yard of what we are to assume is Preacher's house, a yard surrounded by corrugated zinc fencing, and choked with old wooden crates, a rusty refrigerator, a scraggly dog, and clothes line filled with sheets, underwear, shirts and dresses through which Preacher emerges to say "morning" to Longa and Ivan, and to ask Ivan how he's "gettin' along." After Preacher lets them know he will be returning shortly, Ivan watches him leave and then pulls out a small radio that he puts on their work table when he thinks Preacher is out of earshot. The reggae song "Johnny Too Bad" by The Slickers fills the shop:

Walking down the road with your pistol in your waist
Johnny you're too bad [Wohh Ohh]
Walking down the road with your ratchet in your waist
Johnny you're too bad [Wohh ohh]

You're just robbing and stabbing and looting and
shooting
Now you're too bad [repeat]

A violent, seemingly carefree, rude-bwoy/cow-bwoy icon, Johnny Too Bad moves through the world with grandiose machismo. When Longa teases him about the "pretty hat" he has on, he tells Ivan "You really look like Johnny Too Bad. You only need a gun to look like Johnny." But recognizing what we

as viewers have been led to recognize in terms of Ivan's "real" masculine identity, Longa says "But before you get a gun, get a broom and come sweep out the shop. . . . You're a little boy." To this flagrant assault on his imagined masculinity, Ivan responds by waving his hand in disgust and walking out of the shop. It is ironically here in the crowded yard where we see our automotive motif resurface.

A tracking shot follows Ivan walking from the dark shop into the sunny yard, itself a very domestic space. As he walks, we can see more of the surrounding clutter and get a better sense of what is around. The background of this shot is framed by women's dresses hanging limply from the clothesline at the side of the house. As Ivan walks across the screen, the front left quarter panel of a blue car slowly enters the lower right-hand side of the frame. As he turns in front of the vehicle, we can see that it has no doors on its left side. The shot quickly cuts to a side view of those missing doors as we stand on the car's left side and look across the hood as Ivan walks to the car's right side. His body is partially obscured by the hood as the car body itself fills most of the frame in a semi-close-up. What is more striking is that from this angle we can see straight through the car's interior because there are no doors on the right side either. When Ivan walks up to sit in the driver's seat, we can see his entire body crouch down to step in one leg at a time and sit down behind the rusty steering wheel. This steering wheel happens to be on the right-hand side, a sign that it is from local territories, but it really does not

matter because the whole machine is useless in its current state. Ivan is finally in a car but it is literally an old shell going nowhere – even the old bicycle frame in the foreground leaning against the car’s left side has no seat, handle bars or wheels. To underline this fact, it is sitting in a cramped yard facing the side of the house with the clothesline, and enclosed on other sides by additional pieces of this house or neighboring homes. Regardless of who the neighboring structures belong to, his shell is essentially surrounded by domesticity and womanliness. There is no open space in the surrounding frame and no open rugged, rural, frontier that is a familiar symbol of the mythic “wild west.” This is not that “home on the range . . . where the buffalo roam, and the deer and the antelope play.” Ivan has no true freedom here so he must escape into a fake fantasy-land of an abandoned car.

Sitting back in the driver’s seat, he grabs a pair of sunglasses off of the dashboard (clearly left there from an earlier visit), puts them on and pulls out a *comic* book entitled “Top Guns of the West.” This is an obvious nod to cowboys and Westerns, as well as a reminder of Ivan’s level of immaturity as a city cow-bwoy; he can only play make-believe in a car shell. As he reaches for the sunglasses, Elsa appears in the background. We learn that she also lives in the house and that Preacher has been her guardian ever since her mother and father died. A long shot captures her as she is walking from the house into the yard wearing a shower cap, presumably heading to the outdoor shower with soap and towel in hand. Perhaps this is a way to remind

us as viewers that this is a fantasy. As she crosses in front of his vehicle, our eye is drawn from Ivan's body in the car interior to his wider surroundings. We remember that he is not pulled up somewhere relaxing on the side of the road. He is in an abandoned car shell and Elsa's entrance and presence underlines how feminized his situation currently is. However, "Johnny Too Bad" continues to play softly in the background as he tries to convince Elsa that she should go for a ride with him if he fixes up the old bicycle frame. His flirtatious advances feel even more potent when delivered from the close-up shot of his smooth square-jawed face, reflective smile and aviator sunglasses and big sunshine-yellow, apple-jack hat tilted to the left side. All of this for the viewer to look at in addition to "Johnny Too Bad" to listen to, hints at an impending sexual and unquestionably male maturity (albeit a constructed performance). The car shell nevertheless represents a masculinizing endeavor for Ivan and we later see how much of a performance space it really is.

He does eventually fix up the old bicycle frame to working order and convinces Elsa to go for a ride. While the two of them are out one afternoon, Preacher comes looking for him in the work shop. He asks Longa, "Where's that boy?" to which Longa replies, "I don't know Preacher. He might be in his automobile." Preacher storms over to the tiny blue car that we can now see in its entirety for the first time. The camera cuts away to a long shot of Ivan pedaling with Elsa on the cross-bar of his newly refurbished bicycle. It is magically quiet along this seaside road. Even as other cars pass them on the

bicycle, the setting sun dancing on the calm water, and the nature sounds paint a serene picture. A quick cut back to Preacher reaching into Ivan's automobile stands in sharp contrast.

A tight overhead close-up positions us looking down into the front seats of Ivan's sanctuary with Preacher. We see portions of the seats and steering wheel, the hand brake and worn pedals, and Preacher's intruding arm. We can see the top of a Playboy magazine on the left seat and a colorful toy gun on the right/driver's seat. Preacher's hand grabs the gun to inspect it more closely, turning it over in both hands. The camera follows his movement and we see the remnants of the words "Rocket Gun" written on its side. When he pulls the trigger the toy lets out a mechanical whirring machine gun sound and he tosses it out of view. However, as he is pulling the trigger, we can now see the full cover of the Playboy magazine and its white Playmate on the left seat below. Interestingly however, Preacher picks up a comic book from off-screen to inspect next and its cover says "TWO-GUN KID" with "Remember the Alamo!" as a sub-heading in a yellow side box. The significance of this find lies in the fact that Two-Gun Kid was released in 1948 as Marvel Comics' "first-ever western comic book" which essentially meant that it was the company's "first attempt to sell a comic book consisting entirely of western stories." More importantly, the comic book character's life foreshadows Ivan's upcoming tribulations in the film. As Don Markstein explains,

“Two-Gun Kid” was a nickname bestowed upon expert gunslinger Clay Harder. Wrongly accused of murder, he hopped on his horse, Cyclone, and lit out for parts unknown. He spent the rest of his life on the run, despite the fact that he did good wherever he went. His only friend, aside from Cyclone and the eponymous pair of six-guns, was his trusty guitar. Tho [sic] Gene Autry, Roy Rogers and other singing cowboys were common in real life, The Two-Gun Kid was a rare example of that sub-genre created for comics. (1)

The comic genre itself was traditionally a very masculine pleasure and on top of it, this particular comic was about the very heroes that many Caribbean men (and women) held in high esteem. We should also remember that Marvel Comics are coming out of the US and therefore another foreign fiction that is seen as desirable. Additionally, Two-Gun Kid seems to be a *singing* comic cowboy. So if Ivan is a singing cow-bwoy, then it makes perfect sense that Preacher continues to bypass the Playboy magazine still sitting on the seat, to pick up a pair of 45 rpm records off of the floor by that same left seat. It is only after he tosses those off screen, that he picks up and flips through the magazine. At this point the camera pans up to disgusted Preacher’s face bent over the trappings of male performance then shockingly looking towards the vehicle’s back window. The scene cuts to an extreme long tracking shot of Ivan and Elsa still riding by the sea, then cuts back to a close-up of two centerfold pages of white women torn out and stuck to the back

seat. We can see that the seat cover is split and the pages mildly crumpled, a far cry from the two women in Mr. Mustang's car from long ago. Preacher yanks down one hanging naked image and stands upright to tear it up, the camera zooming in on his hands fighting with the pages. As the camera pans up to his face, the shot cuts to Ivan and Elsa returning from their ride.

These details help us to see that Ivan is accumulating what he sees (and what society validates) as ideal "Jamaican" masculinity, "real" manhood. Although they are essentially props at this moment, his door-less car, paper women and toy gun, they all give meaning to his new city life. Yet they represent the very real standards by which men were and continue to be judged in Jamaica (and beyond). As Barry Chevannes points out throughout *Learning to Be a Man*, his ethnographic study of several Jamaican communities, Jamaican men are fully men when they are heterosexually active, have children that they are able to provide for, and are in control of/over women. While these stipulations often do not exist in such absolutes, male success is still held up to this invisible yardstick of conferred power. Preacher represents a different model of masculinity but it is not seen as really viable or attractive. In the land of a Western, Preacher would be the equivalent of an old shop-keeper or ... a preacher, there to act as one of the background foils to the hero. Going back to our hero Ivan, it is worth noting that when he rides in on his bicycle, he is wearing blue jeans and a yellow Western-cut long-sleeved shirt that matches his yellow apple-jack hat, the

shirt and jeans being very reminiscent of the Western wear that many singing cowboys of the 1930s and 1940s would start wearing in the United States (Green, Stanfield), reminding us of his vocal aspirations in the film and of course Jimmy's Cliff's reggae connections in real life. Let us also keep in mind that because so many of these images are imported from Britain or the United States (like the Western, the comic book, the Playboy, and even the car itself) we must question how Ivan (or ultimately Henzell) will make them his own. Remembering that Henzell is basically making a Jamaican Western, part of the answer to how Ivan makes this identity his own lies in the troubling mimicry of a violent silver screen Western hero like Django. Therefore, before we can look at the third key automobile scene, we must turn to pivotal scenes around masculinity and guns.

Guns

As previously mentioned, the ability to financially provide is a major part of becoming a "real" man. To meet this obligation in the face of increasing unemployment, many men turn to illegal activities. While this behavior is not exclusive to Jamaica, we must keep Barry Chevannes's two cautions about Jamaica in mind: "one, that the relationship between unemployment and crime is not one-to-one, for some criminal activities, the drug trade, to cite an important, example are so lucrative that they attract anyone willing to take the risks, employed or unemployed; and second, that

not every adult male criminal act is somehow the attempt of a provider to meet his obligations" (223).

Ivan falls into this first category. He managed to record a single with Hilton Records but refused to sign the contract that would only give him \$20 for it. After he is unable to get the local DJs to play his single without Hilton's backing, he eventually settles for the previous deal. However, because Hilton has flagged Ivan as a "trouble-maker" he decides not to push the song. Ivan uses his few Hilton dollars to buy new clothes for himself and Elsa. Now that they live together in a cramped room, she is not impressed because she has not been able to find any work either. Dreaming of how rich they will be after his record hits, he tells her emphatically that there is "no milk and honey in the sky – not for you, not for me. It's right down here, and I want mine now, tonight!" And he goes out to see how the nightclub crowd likes his tune (unable to convince a weary Elsa to join him).

Decked out in new pin-striped pants, leopard print shirt, shiny black vest, white apple-jack hat, and sunglasses, he runs into his old guide Jose who took him to The Rialto his first night in town. After Jose finds out about Ivan's record (which did play while they were in the club), Jose teases him about the raw deal that he was sure Hilton gave him for his music. Telling Ivan that he should not count on getting a "next cent" from Hilton even if his tune manages to reach number one, Jose introduces him to "big money" – the lucrative drug trade that Chevannes described as profitable enough to make

many take the risk whether unemployed or not. For Ivan, the ganja trade becomes his new job and he quickly learns about the reciprocal deal that the traders have with the police. Traders get police protection in exchange for select “informers” sharing intelligence about more serious criminal activities. With regular money, Ivan and Elsa are much happier now, having moved out of the cramped room into a fellow trader’s modest home (Pedro) because his wife was accidentally shot by army soldiers and he was left to care for his sickly son by himself. Everything is fine until Ivan learns that a plane from Jamaica caught in Miami had \$100,000 worth of marijuana aboard. Ivan feels like they deserve more money for being on the front-line of risk and he starts asking a lot of questions. Being the police liaison, Jose feels that Ivan needs to be “lock[ed] ... up for a little while” to learn a lesson about the delicately balanced hierarchical arrangement, and he calls the police to have him stopped at the roadside checkpoint the traders normally breeze through. Having graduated from an abandoned car shell to a powerful (albeit used) motorcycle, this is the first time we see Ivan driving a motorized vehicle on his own. Remembering how motorized vehicles become the Jamaican cowboy’s horse(power), it is no surprise that in this moment of riding solo, Ivan draws a gun for the first time.

Scene One

An extreme long tracking shot captures Ivan speeding down the highway, coming towards us on his motorized “horse.” Incidentally, he is wearing a relaxed cotton, yellow collar-less shirt whose few buttons are open to reveal his chest – very different from his yellow Western-cut costume-like shirt that he wore that day he was pedaling around on his bicycle with Elsa. Now he is in more of a “sexy man” shirt, far from having to use pedals to get around. He is traveling down a long road with other vehicles, but the flat open landscape lined by lush canes is reminiscent of a Western’s rural frontier. As he waves to the checkpoint officer on his motorcycle and drives by, the officer starts his engine and takes off in pursuit. A quick cut to an extreme close-up of Ivan revving the throttle lets us know that we are going at full speed. A tracking shot follows Ivan’s motorcycle closely from behind with part of the officer’s windscreen showing in the right of the frame – we as viewer are now in the officer’s seat seeing the scene through his eyes, with Ivan just ahead on our left.

As he/we pull up next to Ivan, the scene jumps cuts to a previous encounter Ivan had in prison where he was sentenced to eight lashes from the tamarind switch on his bare behind for repeatedly slicing Longa across the face for trying to take his bicycle. Although he was not imprisoned, he did not want to repeat the experience of being stripped and tied over a barrel by his wrists and ankles, with his penis poked through a hole that caught pain-

induced urine. This memory clearly haunts Ivan as the scene cuts back and forth between the current police chase and the flashbacks of having his underwear snatched down while tied across the barrel as an officer runs up to lash him. The blaring siren cannot block out the noise from the switch and we hear it connecting with Ivan's skin during these moments of flashback.

The scene cuts back to our police pursuit and we are alongside Ivan, his face a hardened glare pointed directly into the camera. A quick cut to an extreme close-up of his crotch reveals the handle of a gun protruding from his pants. With the barrel tucked into the left side of his jeans, the big wooden handle hovers right above his zipper. There is a brass ring welded to its bottom, which not only mirrors the puller on his zipper (calling attention to the double-phallus), it matches the 19th century "six-shooter" revolvers made popular by Samuel Colt's design and the "Wild West era," so named because they had a revolving cylinder of six rounds that fired through a single barrel (Hosley). Ivan's right hand enters the frame to grab the revolver handle and we cut back to his stony glare. As the close-up tracking shot still follows alongside Ivan with him in the middle of the frame, we start to pass him a little - his body now trailing towards the left side of the frame. At this point we catch a glimpse of the revolver now fully out of his pants and briefly visible. When he trails off screen, we only hear the single shot that results in wild camera rolls across ground and sky, and the sounds of metal crashing

and tires screeching ending in a distorted siren signaling that the officer has fallen and the landscape (and Ivan) has been forever changed.

Scene Two

If Ivan's phallic revolver is fully out of his pants, visible and clearly able to shoot with deadly accuracy, it makes perfect sense that immediately after the crash we cut to an extreme close-up of a woman's lips profiled in the dark. The next close-up from the head of a bed shows Ivan on top of her, their heads and naked chests pressed together in a sexual tangle and filling the entire frame with black skin and darker shadows. This is the first woman that we have seen Ivan with besides Elsa (whom he is presumably still with), so with the adoption of this "outside woman" Ivan has technically matured. As Chevannes says, "Becoming an African Caribbean man privileges one to engage in all the above forms of sexual relationships, from the promiscuous and casual to multiple partnerships (which in effect is unrecognized polygamy)" (217). By this yardstick, we can conclude that Ivan has fully ripened. Gone are the green mango days of toy guns, paper women and car shells. He is a full-grown man, a "real"/"reel" cow-bwoy now.

Therefore, when several police officers come to ambush him in this woman's room, he not only hears them before they can find him, he hops out of bed to run outside and gun down three of them. This Ivan stands in stark contrast to country-boy Ivan fresh off the bus and overwhelmed by his city

surroundings in the middle of the day. This cow-bwoy Ivan eludes capture from multiple officers, and runs through the sharp angled maze of the rickety wooden apartment building in the dead of night. Moreover, he is running through the shadows with cat-like precision in only his underwear with two revolvers drawn. The power of this triple phallus propels him down stairs, over walls and across roof-tops in his bare feet, the camera occasionally lingering over his sinewy muscles and sweaty black skin. As witnessed in *Django*, a big gun (both phallic and ballistic) helps a man to essentially become male and thereby actualize his supposed true identity.

This sentiment is echoed by the real life residents of Southside, an inner-city community in Kingston, where Imani Tafari-Ama did extensive ethnographic study. She says, “The first time that I heard a Southside resident say, ‘the biggest gun gives you the most power,’ I was shocked. It was a theme that was to become quite familiar by the end of my fieldwork” (232). Maleness is constructed around guns and guns are constructed around maleness, or as Tafari-Ama says, “the *phallus* is the man is the *phallus*; a vicious chicken-and-egg cycle seemingly without beginning or ending” (239, emphasis in original). Barry Chevannes makes it even clearer:

The gun has become a sort of language among the young people. The most common gesture of a young male in an angry exchange is a hand tensed in the shape of a pistol and an arm pivoting in symbolic intent . . . the so-called inner-city don is a role model not only because of his

ability to command and dispense largesse, but also because he is a living source of power – the power over life and over death, the ultimate *man*. Among the youth, a common name for the penis was rifle . . . In inner-city communities, the dream of many a young boy is to be able to own a gun, preferably for himself but jointly with the crew if necessary (239-240 as quoted in Tafari-Ama, emphasis in original).

Ivan's dreams of owning a gun have been actualized and these cop-killing scenes are both major turning points in the film and part of the crucial masculinizing events that center on looking. C. Richard King reminds us that US gun cultures are phallogentric, centering on men and heterosexual desire: "pursuit, predation, precision, dominance, aggression, toughness, conquest, and immediacy" (87 – 88 in Fruehling Springwood). I would argue that this is hardly exclusive to the US and clearly evident in Jamaica as well as the fictive reality of this film.

Gas Guzzlers and Horse-Power Take Two

Let us recall Ivan's waving to Mr. Mustang out the back of the bus window and his begging Mr. Convertible that night in front of the hotel. In both instances, he is looking from the outside into what he sees as centers of power, symbols of "real" masculinity – the cars made the men powerful in his mind and he tries to emulate this with his own car shell. Now that he has

tapped into the phallogentric power of guns, Ivan is no longer concerned with being on the radio for his music. He now wants to be renowned in a different way. After his naked escape, he steals a drunk man's clothes and walks into the newspaper offices to leave a note for the editor proclaiming "I have made a record of crime history." He later comes back to the space he shares with Elsa to reload his gun and tell her that she will soon hear a news flash about him on the radio. "You didn't believe me?" he asks her with a wicked smile. "Didn't I tell you I was going to be famous one day?" and the prominent shadow of his head on the crowded wall behind him gives the sense that his personality has split – possibly a shell or shadow of his former self.

It is with this new phallogentric bravado that Ivan goes back the same night to shoot (and wound) the woman he was with when the police came because she tried to set him up for Jose. He also chases Jose out of the shanty town through narrow pailing-lined alleys when Jose comes to kill him the next day. With the neighborhood crowd of mostly boys running behind their shoot-out, Ivan sends Jose racing down a litter-strewn gully in a hail of bullets. Ivan stops running at the top of a bridge where he smilingly screams out to Jose's retreating back, "You run but I'll find ya! I'll find ya, yuh hear?!" with a sea of excited grinning boys surrounding him. This moment eerily recalls the young faces watching Django mow down his assailants on the screen in *The Rialto* earlier in the film. On the one hand, viewers can't help but be struck by the Robin Hood figure of adoration that Ivan has turned into

at the hands of a gun, while simultaneously hoping on the other hand that the boys around him find a way to shun gun violence. But Ivan has become what Eric Hobsbawm calls a “social bandit:” “. . . peasant outlaws whom the lord and state regard as criminals, but who remain within peasant society, and are considered by their people as heroes, as champions, avengers, fighters for justice, perhaps even leaders of liberation, and in any case as *men to be admired, helped and supported*” (13, emphasis added). The community helps to hide Ivan for several weeks and as the manhunt draws out, Ivan leaves taunting signs painted all around town saying “I was here but I disappear.” The words “I am everywhere” are even painted on the police headquarters’ wall. Because we do not actually see Ivan painting these proclamations, we can only assume that he is doing them himself, but the level of community investment in his challenge to police authority leaves room for the possibility that others might be painting them on his behalf as a statement of shared commitment. His violent escapades make him a wanted man in many senses of the phrase. Gun battles give him masculine prowess along with musical legitimacy in the public eye. His song is now constantly requested on the radio stations while the manhunt continues, pumping out of every transistor and juke box speaker:

Well the oppressors are trying to keep me down
Trying to drive me underground
And they think that they have got the battle won
I say forgive them Lord they know not what they’ve done
‘Cause as sure the sun will shine
I’m gonna get my share now, what’s mine

And then the harder they come
The harder they fall one and all
The harder they come
The harder they fall one and all

With real guns (as opposed to his previous toy), we can see that Ivan's cowboy power has clearly shifted, allowing us to quickly turn back to our third automobile scene.

Scene Three

Ivan comes back to the hotel where he was rebuffed by Mr. Convertible and the hotel steward so many nights ago with a renewed sense of publicly affirmed self and masculinity. Yet he does not come out of the shadows like he had previously. Instead, the scene begins with him walking through the guests from the pool. He is on the inside of leisure as an establishing shot shows us the hotel roofs and the pool deck that is filled with beach chairs, matching umbrellas, palm trees and surrounding bougainvillea. White people sunbathe lazily in the chairs and three white men stand chatting with two black men in uniform (presumably hotel workers) under one of the umbrellas. Ivan enters from the right of the screen in a low angle shot of his profile, as if we are sitting in a beach chair too. He is wearing a brown velour vest and pants that are etched with yellow stitching, and a yellow button-up shirt that has a gigantic 70s-style collar. Once again, Ivan's signature yellow shirt has been significantly transformed according to his

measure of manliness. The collar fans out to eagle-like proportions with the tips just touching the tops of his biceps, while the bottom of the vest touches the tops of his thighs. The edge of the collar that lies on his chest has scalloped curves giving them an added wing-like quality. Even his sunglasses have been upgraded, these aviators now trimmed with a bright gold. He pauses at one point to look around, frozen in a low angle medium shot from the waist up, giving us time to take in his virility, to really look at him.

The next shot puts us outside the main entrance and we see him coming towards the double glass doors from *inside* of the hotel lobby. A white woman passes behind him as he *knocks* on the glass for the steward to open the door for him. Cigarette in mouth, Ivan strides past the uniformed steward and down the three steps to the same canopy where he met Mr. Convertible that rainy night. This time the opulence of the surroundings is communicated with the white columns of the canopy, the white siding of the hotel, the white uniform of the steward, the sparkle from the sun shining off of the wall of windows in the background, and of course, the white convertible parked in the foreground with its top down. From the look of the high white leather headrests, this seems to be the exact car that Mr. Convertible drove away in before.

Ivan strolls over to the driver's side (a left-hand drive), and peers in. When he opens the door to get in, the shot jumps to the same low angle shot from the passenger seat. The seat backs are on the left and part of the

windshield and steering wheel close the frame on the right. We can even see the overhead black canister lights on the white canopy ceiling (although they are off because it is daytime). Ivan sits behind the wheel, turns the keys that are in the ignition and starts playing with the radio and other controls. When the windshield wipers start moving, the steward comes over to shove his shoulder and ask "Hey, what're you doing in the man car?" The shot jumps to a driver's side exterior shot of Ivan in the driver's seat preoccupied with the dials and the steward's hand resting on the car door. When he shoves his shoulder, Ivan is slightly startled as though snapped out of a dream, but he simply looks up towards the steward's face off camera while his right hand reaches across his body. With his head craned upwards like a child looking at a tall adult, Ivan asks the steward, "You can drive?" "Yes," he responds, to which Ivan pulls his right hand up to point his gun at the steward. "Drive," Ivan orders, and the next scene is a high overhead shot of the hotel parking lot and surrounding buildings where we can see that this is the Skyline Hotel, one of the first hotels built in Kingston in the 1960s/70s.¹

The camera zooms in and follows the white convertible from overhead as it screeches out of the lot to cross the paved road and drive up onto dirt that gives way to grass. The steward comes to a stop in the middle of this grassy green space, gets out of the car and walks away looking back over his shoulder at Ivan moving over into the driver's seat. From this overhead shot,

¹ The Skyline was bought out by a Hendrickson family and renamed the Courtleigh. The Courtleigh Manor, also owned by the Hendricksons, was not welcoming to locals and was demolished around 2005. A Courtleigh Hotel and Suites still exists.

the white car and white steward uniform stand in sharp contrast to the surrounding green background. The next shot is a tight close up seemingly from the back seat of Ivan behind the wheel and the immediate start of Jimmy Cliff's song "You Can Get It If You Really Want." We see the same high-back white leather head rests, steering wheel and sliver of windshield as Ivan grabs the wheel and starts driving. The green background zooms past him as he turns the wheel back and forth and speeds around with a wide grin. When the camera cuts to a wide angled shot, we see that Ivan is driving around on an empty golf course. He is zig-zagging in between trees, a hole flag (formally called "the pin") and at least a dozen egrets that jump and fly to get out of his way. We cut back to a close-up of his profile in the driver's seat laughing, smiling and looking around while the grass zooms by. The shots cut back and forth between these tight profiles and wide angled shots of his weaving around on the golf course like a teenager learning to drive. Since this *is* his first time behind the wheel of a moving automobile, he is basically learning to drive. But because it is on a golf course and not a road, this scene is very different than what we would usually expect from this rite of passage. Ivan is clearly on a different path and the camera spends a long time on him here, playing the entire chorus and first stanza of Cliff's song:

You can get it if you really want
You can get it if you really want
You can get it if you really want
But you must try, try and try, try and try

You'll succeed at last

Persecution you must bear
Win or lose you got to get your share
Got your mind set on a dream
You can get it though hard it may seem now

CHORUS

This is clearly the dream that Ivan had his mind set on and he is obviously thrilled. This is also the same song that played when he was watching and waving at Mr. Mustang through the bus window ages ago. No longer the outsider unable to keep up with this image of masculine “cool,” he is on the inside of “cool” (walking from the *inside* of the hotel) and the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity. The white car and white egrets against the green grass and lush trees create an Edenic fantasy setting. He has become the heroic cow-bwoy riding on his white horse. But the flip side to the idea of achieving a dream/identity built around violence is that part of it is constructed fantasy and thereby not sustainable. Nevertheless, Ivan continues to play out his cow-bwoy role until the end. He has gotten the gun(s), the gyal (in the outside woman), and the ultimate horse (with this joyride). The only pieces missing are stock gunslinger photos and a final showdown, taking us back to guns and our final two scenes for analysis.

Guns Take Two

There is little cruelty in Western movies, and little sentimentality; our eyes are not focused on the sufferings of the defeated but on *the*

deportment of the hero. Really, it is not violence at all which is the ‘point’ of the Western movie, but *a certain image of man, a style*, which expresses itself most clearly in violence. Watch a child with his toy guns and you will see: what most interest him is not (as we so much fear) the fantasy of hurting others, but to work out *how a man might look* when he shoots or is shot. A hero is one who looks like a hero. (Robert Warshow as quoted in Warner, 11, emphasis added)

Although he has now fired his guns several times, Ivan is still interested in “work[ing] out how a man might look when he shoots.” The still images of the cowboys from his comic books haunt his imagination and he goes to get pictures taken of himself.

Scene Three

When this scene opens the screen is two-thirds darkness with a dark shadow covering more than half of the left frame and a hazy circle of dim light surrounded by more shadow on the right. There is a shutter and ornate wallpaper but it is also hazy and barely visible through this obscured telescopic view. Suddenly an *upside-down* Ivan saunters from the edge of darkness on the left into the center of the dim circle of light. He has on dark pants, a printed shirt, black vest and white apple-jack hat. He stands facing the camera and with legs apart, he uses both hands to flare his vest open to reveal two gun butts poking out of his tight pants. He relaxes his hands by his

sides standing as if waiting for us to notice him. Then he quickly reaches for each butt, pulls them out of his pants, aims at the camera and crouches in one fluid motion. The bright light shining on him casts two shadows on the wall behind him (one on either side of him), reminding us of that split personality that we saw when he was talking to Elsa about being famous one day. And remember, he is still upside-down.

The shot then cuts to his right-side up image, standing in front of what is now revealed as a photographer's studio wall, the shutters and ornate wallpaper simply a drawn design on a backdrop. He is standing upright, still aiming his guns towards us, but then drops to another crouch-and-aim position. A quick cut to a black-and-white photograph shows us the picture that was presumably just taken. We become the photographer and he is posing for us. The frozen still gives us a chance to look at Ivan's body up close and we can see that he is wearing the leopard-print shirt (opened to the middle of his chest), the black snake-skin looking vest and white hat from the night he went to hear his record in the club – the night he shouted to Elsa "I want mine now, tonight!" Back to the color sequence of him jumping to crouch in another pose, then back to the still black-and-white photograph of this new angle. He jumps and thrusts the left gun forward, then jumps and thrusts the right, long fringe-like tassels swinging from his waist (that we have never seen him wear before), drawing our attention to his muscular legs. Lee Clark Mitchell reminds us what all of this adornment does:

In Western films, the eye is trapped and held up by fetish items associated with parts of the body, as our gaze is directed from eyes, chins, chests, legs, and muscle groups to articles instead that either cover or exaggerate them. Hats of assorted shapes and tilts . . . handkerchiefs knotted round the neck; ornate buckles, gun belts worn low, and, of course, an array of holsters and six-shooters; pearl-buttoned shirts, fringed jackets; leather gloves carefully fitted and as carefully stripped off; leggings, chaps (with the groin area duly uncovered and framed), and tight-fitting Levi's or leather pants (in the only genre that allows men to wear them); long, stylized linen dusters; pointed, high-heeled boots and spurs: all the way up and down, the cowboy's costume invites and deflects our gaze. (178)

After each jump and twirl, we see the corresponding photo and then go back to Ivan performing his gunslinger poses, each photo prominently displaying his double guns and even his snake-skin boots.

However, in the midst of showing us the black-and-white stills, there is another series of *color* photographs interspersed throughout. Interestingly, these are photos that are not all taken from the film that we have come to know. Some of them seem like behind-the-scene images because we sometimes see Ivan in places, wearing clothes and with people that we have never seen in the film: laying on a beach chair on the sand in different clothes; in a recording studio at two different times with people and clothes that we

have never seen; driving in the white convertible on the golf course but this time with people in the background; sharing drinks with a random woman that we do not know; standing by the pool in his brown velour vest and pants; and close-up head shots of him grinning in one picture with a new shirt and smoking in another wearing his brown velour. These images not only create another layer of double-looking, they strangely solidify that film Ivan has indeed become the bright star that was on the front of his blue long-sleeve t-shirt when he recorded “The Harder They Come” in Hilton’s studio (the star itself was yellow, offering yet another clever twist of Ivan’s signature color). The color photos show Jimmy Cliff playing Ivan, as well as Jimmy Cliff possibly being himself. An ironic blend of fact (Jimmy Cliff as himself) and fiction (Jimmy Cliff as Ivan), these relaxed jovial moments lend a sense that film Ivan is living the “good life” that he has been fascinated with ever since his arrival from the country. This is what a “reel”/“real” man looks like in his eyes – he is at the height of his success, underlining the reason why he wants to capture this moment in a photograph. More importantly, he wants a wider audience to look at him, and he sends one of the photos to the newspaper editor for publication.

Scene Four

Success built on violence, eventually comes to a fall. Detective Ray Jones eventually cracks down on the ganja trade to pressure the men into

giving up Ivan's whereabouts. However, it is Elsa who can no longer watch the suffering of the little Rasta boy Rupert that she has been helping to take care of. He needs medicine and "good food" to heal, and that comes with the ganja trade money that will only start flowing again after Ivan is captured. She goes back to Preacher to tell him that Ivan is planning to catch a shipping vessel on its way to Cuba where he hopes to get a revolutionary hero's welcome and medical attention for his wounded shoulder. He was shot in a surprise hillside raid that he eventually escaped, but he rode away on a bicycle symbolizing the vulnerability of a child. On the morning he is to go to Cuba, Ivan tries to swim out to the boat when it passes the island cove he is hiding in, but he cannot catch it and has to swim back to shore. Wearing a bloody bandage on his right shoulder and his yellow star shirt that is now dripping wet and covered with sand, Ivan seems burdened by the natural surroundings he once so deftly conquered. This Ivan has no agility and cannot keep up with the boat or even himself as he staggers to a nearby tree to lie back on its trunk. He does not look like a cow-bwoy star anymore. And even the land has changed. Gone is the intricate landscape of shanty town alleys, wooden apartment buildings and long highways, as we are left with the flat sandy terrain that is similar to a Western's ghost town right before a show-down.

A long shot shows a group of officers storming the deserted island where Ivan is hiding. They jump off of their police boat to run through the

shallow water and lie flat on the sandy shore with rifles drawn. As they run across the sand in a line of at least ten moving across the screen from left to right, the scene cuts to Ivan on the right side of the screen jumping up to watch their movements from behind the tree he was resting against. Remember that Django was also hiding behind a tree but his was weathered and bare, whereas Ivan's is alive with green. When the officers advance, the frame cuts to an extreme close-up of Ivan's red eyes and nose bridge with sand still stuck to his right cheekbone. There is a blankness in his stare making him appear concerned or possibly worried. However, before we can tell, we quickly cut back to the police burrowing in shrubbery trying to gain optimal firing position. After Ivan peeks out from either side of the tree, the shot jumps to another extreme close-up of his face staring down the barrel of his gun seemingly unaffected. He is on the right side of the screen and the officers are on the left. He cocks the hammer and the chamber slowly rotates. When an officer gets up from his hiding place to run further down the line of fellow officers, we jump back to Ivan's close-up. A few tiny leaves cover his face and his gun barrel seems to rest against the sliver of tree trunk showing in the left of the frame. He squeezes the trigger and fires. A quick jump cut to the running officer on the open sand shows him falling out of the frame behind a tiny tree, his feet briefly kicking up into the frame as if to signify his last breath.

The very next scene abruptly jumps back to The Rialto to show the gold-toothed man and his friend sitting in the cheering *Django* audience from the beginning of the film. The insertion of this clip at this time is crucial for it lets us know that now Ivan is truly the star cow-bwoy in his own Western, and that his sense of fantasy and reality are dangerously intertwined. By editing these sequences together, Henzell creates another double-sense of looking. We are looking at Ivan, but Ivan is now being watched by a *new* audience that is technically an *old* audience that *he* was once a part of – so he is oddly looking at himself on screen. More significantly, it is a predominantly male audience who cheers when they see “reel” masculinity performed through gun violence. Underscoring this dual screen persona, the shot cuts back to a close-up of Ivan behind the tree grinning at the accuracy of his shot but The Rialto audience cheers are still audible in this beach showdown! Their enthusiasm is now part of the soundtrack living in Ivan’s head. Moreover, extending those previous cheers into this new moment makes us transfer any positive feelings of rooting for Django as hero to now route for Ivan as hero (in addition to our prior investment in his well-being as a character that we have come to know and love).

When the scene cuts back to Ivan, we are in front of him (as though watching from a movie seat) and can see more of the tree, confirming that his gun is indeed resting on it for leverage. More importantly, we are reminded that his right shoulder is injured because the bandages are clearly visible from

underneath his shirt. Like Django who still exacts final revenge on his enemies despite his crushed hands, Ivan is also a wounded hero able to hit one of the officers with his left hand. A medium shot reveals their firing on his hiding place from the left and a quick cut to him running to another tree on the right, spinning, jumping and crouching (like in his photos) to dodge bullets and answer their machine guns with single shots from his six-shooter. When he emerges from the first tree, we see that Ivan is interestingly able to hold both of his guns despite his injury. This is of vital significance because it fits into the hero's violation-and-recovery model of most Westerns (Clark Mitchell), as well as the model of gunplay canceling out grief, pain and the need for real emotional work in and between men (Arjet). In other words, in a gunplay film the presence of a gun makes everything better for the hero:

The physical power of the gun, . . . is portrayed through its effects: its ability to knock people down, shatter windows, detonate gas tanks, destroy furniture, and otherwise affect the physical world in spectacular ways. . . . When the plot and or theme call for it, weapons that possess great destructive potential in lived experience are proved completely ineffectual. Heroes run through withering fire that would cut down entire platoons, incapacitating *bullet wounds to the shoulder are effectively healed with improvised bandages* (or ignored entirely . . .) and car tires show astounding resistance to puncture. The physical power

of the gun serves only to magnify and channel the ideological power of the gunplay hero. (Arjet 129 – 130, emphasis added)

To underscore the potency of this ideological power, the Rialto crowd continues to cheer and Ivan's shoulder seems to have suddenly healed as he scrambles to another tree with dust flying at his feet from the machine gun fire. He is clearly outnumbered, but the soldiers still cannot touch him even with all of their automatic weaponry. With his guns in his hands, he is an invincible hero.

A quick close-up of Ivan pulling the trigger and hearing a click, lets us know that our hero has run out of bullets. But instead of simply running for cover, Ivan crouches in one of his gunslinger poses, points his guns and makes shooting noises with his mouth like a child playing shoot-out: "Ay Ay" he yells at the officers (as in "Pow Pow") and he dives behind some bushes to reload. Quick cuts back to The Rialto audience remind us that this is still performance. Yet when Ivan gets a chance to reload his guns, a close-up of his hands around the open chamber of one gun reveal him taking the last bullet *out*. We can clearly see the six empty holes before he closes the gun back up and holds it with his left hand in a firing grip. The scene cuts to a frontal medium shot of Ivan crouched down in the sand behind leaves and a tree trunk looking at both guns. He stands up looking into one of the chambers as if checking to make sure they are both empty. On top of that, we can still hear the laughter and cheering from The Rialto which is broken up

by the lead officer's voice slicing in to say "We are going to do a frontal assault." This is a simultaneously strange, tragic and powerful moment since Ivan seems to either be unaware of the gravity of the situation or completely aware and choosing to die in the heroic cowboy glory that he has been consuming. Death by this constructed notion of mythic honor is considered far better than death by cornered capture.

Ivan yells to the officers "All right. Hold on. Don't worry with the army business. One man just come out." A quick cut to a close-up of boy's faces laughing in *The Rialto* and then a jump back to a low-angled medium shot of Ivan emerging from the bushes and pointing his guns towards the officers. "Who's the bad man? Who can draw?" As he yells, the low angle shot gives us a sense that we are watching him on screen. The camera pans around him as he moves and he grows bigger than the frame itself, his head and feet off screen and his body seemingly as tall as the surrounding skinny trees. We cut to a full shot of the police approaching through the bushes, still moving from right to left with their rifles drawn and then back to the panning shot of Ivan circling, advancing and yelling "Come on out! One who can draw!" Insert another shadowy close up of shining faces and white teeth gleaming in *The Rialto*, the laughter and chatter still a running soundtrack throughout. Back to a panning shot circling around Ivan who is still advancing with empty guns yelling "One who can draw, just come out!" We then get a tight close-up shot of at least seven officers and their rifles

advancing in profile across the screen. We are so close to their group that only the thighs, belt and rifle handle of the officer in the foreground is visible, while the full bodies of others can be seen in the background.

The next shot is the same extreme close-up of Ivan's eyes with the sand on his right cheekbone that we saw before when he first watched the officers' approach. This is the shot where he seemed concerned or worried, but to answer this possible vulnerability the soundtrack gives us Jose's voice from that Rialto night: "Shut your mouth! You think hero can die 'til the last reel?" as if bolstered by this pronouncement, Ivan immediately starts to come out from the trees yelling: "Send out one bad man!" Quick cuts to six of the advancing officers, then to the cheering Rialto crowd and then back to a full shot of Ivan emerging from the one brown patch of leaves in the background of green trees. Perhaps these dead leaves are foreshadowing death or signaling that he is already dead since he is emerging from cover with these two empty guns. He is also noticeably smaller than the trees in this shot compared to how he seemed to match their height before. He walks sideways into the open and yells "Send him out!" Another jump cut back to the profile of a young boy who is laughing and pointing at the screen in *The Rialto*, his face lit with white light and we are reminded of how so many young boys (and girls) in Jamaica and beyond attach violence to the meaning of "real" masculinity. A portion of Keith Warner's observation quoted earlier is worth repeating here: "Westerns were dominated by men trying to carve out their

turf, to establish their manhood through their quick draw and their overall toughness” (10).

We must also remember cinema’s early seduction of Caribbean viewers that Warner also talked about. The shot of this young boy’s face laughing in *The Rialto* brings together the idea of innocence and this lure/admiration of performed toughness. He clearly (and sadly) sees himself in Ivan who dominates the next shot. More significantly, we are reminded of how high the stakes in the politics of impersonation really are – boys masquerading as men masquerading as “real” men. As Gary T. Barker tells us,

In much of the world, young men die earlier than young women and die more often than older men largely because they are trying to live up to certain models of manhood – they are dying to *prove that they are ‘real men’*. They are driving a car or motorcycle too fast mostly to demonstrate to others that they like the thrill of risk and daring. Or they are on the streets, often working, or maybe just hanging out in public spaces where gang-related and other forms of violence most frequently occur, or they gravitate to a violent version of manhood associated with gangs [or mythic Westerns]. (2, emphasis added)

We have watched this young man Ivan go through a variety of risky and daring escapades. He measures success with how long he can sustain the performance, how long he can wear the marauding mask. After the clip of the

young smiling boy in *The Rialto*, we cut back to a medium shot of Ivan who is getting bigger and bigger in the frame as he advances towards us. This low angle shot reveals his body from the thighs upwards, and he is as tall as the frame itself. Viewing the action from below in this way emphasizes his power and makes him literally seem larger than life. The *Rialto* chatter and cheers are really loud at this point and drown out any other soundtrack noises.

Ivan's profile continues to diagonally advance towards us as he comes out to stand in front of the officers. His low angle close-up dominates the image on the right side of the frame and we can only see from his stomach to his nose since his figure has grown so large that the top of his head is off screen in the patch of blue sky in the background. He is even taller than the trees in the background (see Figure 1).

The camera continues to tightly pan around his torso and now we can only see the profile of his stomach, chest and two hands gripping the dark steely guns against the blurry background of green leaves – the two points of the yellow star on his shirt peeking out to remind us that he is still the star. The camera continues this tight circular pan until we can only see an extreme close-up of Ivan's left hand and gun against the blue sky (incidentally, there is no ring welded to the bottom of this gun). The *Rialto* chattering and laughter grows louder off screen. A final turn around his body brings the camera from beside him to behind him and a low angled extreme close-up positions his body across half of the screen, except now we can only see his

left hand, part of his buttocks and the bottom of his shirt. This shot also reveals at least three officers in the background walking up to face him. Because they are the same height as the thin bushes they are coming through and slightly out of focus, they do not seem immediately powerful in comparison to the towering giant that Ivan seems to be (see Figure 2).

The pan moves us directly behind him in this tight shot of his buttocks and left arm and Ivan slowly lowers his left gun (and most likely the right one as well) to his side. Like Django, we as audience are on his side (both physically and emotionally), looking squarely at our enemies across the open space between us. He steps directly in front of the camera in this low angled close up, bringing his right arm into view and temporarily obscuring our view of the officers in the distance. To heighten our anticipation, The Rialto crowd sounds noticeably stop. Everyone is holding their breath. From this arms-by-sides position that we watched him practice over and over in the photographer's studio, Ivan yells "Draw!"

He bends both arms up in shooting position and we hear only the rapid popping of machine gun fire. Although we can barely see the head of one officer through the scrawny bush in the background, the explosive spray of sand directly in front of Ivan lets us know that they are shooting right at him. Ivan's body twists to the left and for a brief moment we can see both of his guns gripped firmly in front of his chest – he has not let them go. His body drops straight down onto the sand and out of the frame, leaving only

his left elbow poking up at the very bottom of the screen. The mango has fallen from the tree. The hero certainly did wait until the very last reel to die because the very next scene cuts to an abrupt screen of black. Then credits roll (over a close-up of woman's undulating belly and buttocks in a iridescent mini-skirt).

Henzell's choice to "frame cut the fall" makes Ivan's drop to the sand a choppy cartoonish motion. In the DVD audio commentary, Henzell says, "I wanted to do the opposite of *Bonnie and Clyde* where it's all slow motion and thing. I wanted the death to come fast . . . so that he's shot and he drops faster than normal not more slowly than normal and you cut immediately to black." Given the title of the film and Ivan's/Cliff's hit recording, this is a logical end: "The harder they come/The harder they fall one and all." Ivan has certainly come hard throughout the film and in the end he seems resigned for a hard fall. Yet more than a description of Ivan's fate, this lyrical line predicts the fate of boys and men who choose to construct their masculine identities around violent solutions. At the same time, "real" masculinity is generally defined as nothing less than hard, so there does not seem to be much room for deviation. This unquestioned commitment to a culture of copying "pursuit, predation, precision, dominance, aggression, toughness, conquest, and immediacy" (87 - 88 in Fruehling *Springwood*) feels devoid of substance and as barren as any Western landscape.

Yet now that Ivan is no longer in the frame, our eyes wander to take in more of this surrounding landscape. We are facing the sea across a stretch of flat sand and the long shadows indicate that this showdown mirrors many Westerns and takes place close to sundown. As Ivan falls, the officers continue to advance, two of their bodies now in the foreground having grown much larger. We can also see at least four others in the background, looking on from the distant right seemingly with their guns drawn as well. There is a tiny bush in the background and the remains of a thatched roof of some kind on the right side of the screen. This structure momentarily appears on the right side of Ivan's body when he yells, "Draw!" but we do not really pay attention to it. Seeing more of it now, it is obvious that it stands in a state of disrepair. The wooden skeletal spines jut out well beyond the few bits of dry thatch on its apex, giving us the feeling that this stretch of beach is truly deserted – a Jamaican version of the Western ghost town. Furthermore, the structure itself is inadequate shelter for anything, possibly symbolizing the fraying of violent masculinity; in other words, there is no solace in this type of constructed identity.

It could also be a metaphor for the state of disrepair that the Jamaican nation is in at this time during the 1970s. Katherine Smith draws a similar parallel between the film *Bonnie and Clyde* and the United States in 1967:

In the late sixties, when the violence of Vietnam was on everyone's television screen, the media were pandering to and creating

sensational violence as never before. . . . Where an audience can most specifically see and feel that war is . . . not only in the large amounts of graphic violence in the film but, more significantly, in the way the movie logically links its violence to the sensationalism of the media coverage. In a way, Bonnie and Clyde's need for *glossy images of themselves* is what motivates them and what seals their fate. . . . They are mindless participants in a glorious and violent sensationalism, the same sensationalism with which the public media created a confused national identity during the war-torn sixties. (154, as quoted in Corrigan, emphasis added)

In that film, Bonnie and Clyde actually have their pictures taken in theatrical gangster poses, a move clearly echoed with the cow-bwoy poses in *The Harder They Come*. These "exaggerated images of themselves" according to Smith, "allo[w] them to have a real identity apart from their depression-ravaged society" (153, in Corrigan). Smith argues that they are more motivated by seeing themselves in the newspaper than by getting lots of money. In the film, Ivan becomes more motivated with this type of notoriety as well, replacing his previous concern with having his music on the radio. At one point while hiding out after being shot in the shoulder, he asked Pedro why the paper had not printed the photographs he sent to the editor yet. He became obsessed with the projection of both being and impersonating or mimicking this mythic urban cow-bwoy. Given Smith's argument about *Bonnie and*

Clyde's reflection of the socio-political climate in the United States, it is arguable that a similar historical mirroring is happening in *The Harder They Come*.

We as viewers learn from Henzell's DVD audio commentary that the character Ivan is actually based on the real-life story of Ivanhoe "Rhygin(g)" [spelled with and without a "g" on the end] Martin, a criminal who terrorized Kingston, Jamaica in the late 1940s. Henzell's choice to set this particular story in the 1970s instead of recreating the 1940s, lends more evidence to the idea that there is a deeper commentary happening. In the film, Ivan constructs an identity that mirrors the thuggish violence of the political cowboys on the historical scene in the political landscape of 1970s Jamaica. His demise could be a critique of the efficacy of this strategy, but his transformation into the people's hero could also be a critique of the sensationalism that surrounded the original story. This blend of fact and fiction tucked in between various layers of looking requires that we end our analysis with a final turn to some historical information.

Will the Real/Reel Ivan Please Stand Up?

On September 2, 1948, the headline in one of Jamaica's newspapers, *The Gleaner*, read:

*Police hunt desperado after running gun battle in city's west-
end*

2 KILLED, 4 SHOT BY

ESCAPED CONVICT

BULLETS from the revolver of an escaped con-/vict took two lives and caused injury to four other/persons between Tuesday night and early yester-/day morning in West-end Kingston./ Dead were:

Detective Corporal Edgar Lewis of/ the Criminal Investigation Department and Lucilda/ Tibby Young of 257 Spanish Town Road./ Injured were: Detective H. E. Earle of the C.I.D./ Ex-Sergeant Gallimore, of the Jamaica Constabu-/lary, . . . Estella Brown/ and Iris Bailey, both of 257 Spanish Town Road.

From one of the windows of the General Penitentiary, Ivan/ Martin, serving five years in the brickyard for burglary and lar-/ceny, leaped to freedom one night early in April. All police sta-/tions were notified, and the biggest man hunt in Jamaica's police/ history started./ Martin was quiet. He stayed underground, but somebody/ talked. (1, italics and bold in original)

Thus the true story of Ivan Martin begins. The newspaper features several pictures and the story is told in different columns all over the front page around these images. This excerpt highlights the fact that the *real* Ivan (the historical person) was quiet and came to be this mythic figure through acts of

violence. Although the real Ivan might have been quiet by necessity (having escaped from prison for five months) not to mention, we do not know whether this captures his personality. However, the *reel* Ivan (in the film) also starts out as quiet, moving from inexperienced country boy to infamous “desperado.” It is interesting that the writers choose to describe the real Ivan as a “desperado” since the term invokes images of the wild west along with its general meaning of “a desperate or reckless person, especially a criminal” (Oxford American Dictionary online). This invocation reminds us that the western tradition has a long history which reaches far beyond United States borders. As Susan Hayward points out,

The tradition of the cowboy as mythic hero dates back to the western dime novels published from the 1860s. These novels dramatized lives that were both real and fictional and elevated the cowboy to mythic status. In the early days of cinema, at least, these novels were the primary sources for the western movie, which is a part explanation for the highly ritualized nature of this genre. These novels also heroized outlaws . . . And . . . the heroization of the outlaw . . . became a typology of this genre. In fact, real-live outlaws and cowboys . . . came into the film industry up until as late as the 1930s and 1940s (Gene Autry and Roy Rogers are two well-known names). (412)

Ivan Martin becomes a well-known name in Jamaican history and with Henzell’s film, portions of his life are mythologized on an international scale.

However, the specifics of the actual events in 1948 should cause us to question the impact of glamourized retellings. Another section from *The Gleaner* gives us a better idea about exactly what happened that day:

Running Gun Battle

According to a Police statement issued yesterday morning, it is believed/ that the wanted man escaped from the hotel into a block of tenements . . . / A call for sufficient police was made to form a cordon around the block,/ but before adequate numbers assembled for the purpose, a running gun-/battle, *reminiscent of Chicago gangster days* ensued . . .

The Police cordon was soon established, and it was believed that the /wanted man was still held within the block, as he was then only dressed/ *in under-pants, and was without outer-clothing and footwear,* but owing/ to the amount of cover provided by the wall-to-wall tenements and the/ darkness, the fugitive escaped, although the Police ring was held until daybreak.

The trail of blood, death and violence did not end there. A man,/ named Eric Goldson, was marked for death. Ivan Martin, so it is alleged,/ believed that Goldson had 'stooled' on him.

Somewhere around 1:30 a.m. yesterday, a man entered rooms at the/ end of 257 Spanish Town Road/ . . . To reach/ the rooms the man

had to travel fully half a mile through bush and bracken/ and over undulating terrain, while dogs barked at him from every gate./ According to statements made to the Police, the same man who had fatally/ shot Detective Corporal Lewis and injured Detective Earle and ex-Sergeant/ Gallimore, entered the rooms in which Lucilda Tibby Young and her two/ friends, Estella Brown and Iris Bailey, were asleep. Young was a friend/ of Eric Goldson.

"I'm Going To Get You"

He knocked at the door. Lucilda Tibby Young answered, opened the/ door. A gun was in the man's hand. He asked for Goldson. Goldson was/ not there. Estella Brown dived under the bed. The sight of the gun had/ unnerved her. The man's face tightened into a scowl. "If I can't get him,/ I'm going to get you!" he said. The revolver exploded and Young clutched her hands at her chest. (1, italics added, bold in original)

As we know from the sub-headlines, Ms. Tibby Young died (along with Detective Corporal Lewis who was shot earlier) and four others were injured. Similar to mention of a "desperado," *Gleaner* reporters once again invoke the mythic tropes of violent masculinity by mentioning Chicago gangsters here. We can also see that Henzell kept portions of the story for the film version,

since the reel Ivan escaped a police chase into the night in nothing but underwear as well. While the facts are reported, parts of the newspaper's retelling have a cinematic quality as though pandering to readers' needs for sensationalism, reminiscent of the charge Katherine Smith makes of the connection between the film *Bonnie and Clyde* and the media coverage of the Vietnam War in the United States. But whether the public intrigue with the story of "Rhyging" originated in the reporting or in the crimes themselves, the result was indeed fascination (the word printed on the bus the reel Ivan rides to town).

On September 7, 1948 *The Gleaner* reported just how much the fascination had gripped the community:

Police protection was placed/ at the 'Gleaner's' Montego Bay/ sales window to-day in a vain at-/tempt to maintain order, everyone/ being anxious to read of any possible/ new development in the escapades/ of Ivanhoe Martin ('Rhyging'), in/ Kingston./ Crowds flocked to the window to/ get papers, rather than wait at/ their homes until the newspaper/ reached them. All copies were sold/ out in short order, and some slight/ disorders occurred. (3)

The fascination was (and still is) very real and the real Ivan stayed hidden for six weeks. During that time, the newspaper reported that he wrote a letter expressing his intention of adding other lives to the death list (Sept. 6th), while

other letters alleged that Rhyging was everywhere from Portland to St. Catherine's (Sept. 7th). Still others claimed to have seen him in a hut near the Spanish Town Road, in two nightclubs and riding a bicycle along East Queen Street in the morning (Sept. 5th). A fund was created for the slain detective's family (Sept. 9th) and bold headlines announced the police reward of 200 pounds for information leading to his capture (Sept. 5th). After making the reward announcement, reporters describe the real Ivan on the same page in a text box:

THIS IS/ THE/ KILLER

If you see this man, get to the/ nearest phone and call the police.

This is the latest and fuller/ description of "Killer" Martin:/

Age 29, height 5 ft. 3 inches/ (may be wearing shoes with/ high heels – "Duke" heels they/ are known in Kingston's west-/end underground – making him/ 5 ft. 5 inches), medium build,/ colour black, hair and eyes black,/ several front teeth missing in/ upper jaw, but may be wearing/ false teeth with all plain or with/ one or two teeth of gold.

Often wears sun glasses – polarized sun glasses with a/ narrow bridge. Has a habit of/ looking backward every few/ steps when walking, and spitting/ after a few words he speaks.

Approach with caution. He is/ dangerous. He is armed. (1)

The original description also included that he would “probably be found in possession of a revolver” and that he “is extremely agile, [and a] neat dresser” (Sept. 2nd). Again we can see several similarities between the factual and fictional Ivans. Henzell picked up on the multiple police attempts to thwart his stealthy movements as well as the emphasis on clothes and style. One striking detail about the real Ivan, however, is that he is only 5 feet 3 inches tall. Mythic constructions around invincible masculinity are not about tiny men, making it even more interesting that the real Ivan sometimes wore heels. He seems very aware of the stature that “real” men are supposed to be tall as well as tough. Perhaps this is why the real Ivan also took pictures of himself crouched with two guns in gunslinger poses since height does not really have the same effect in a photograph. It is not clear who sent the photographs to the newspaper, but in the edition announcing his death, *The Gleaner* printed an image of him in a “characteristic gunman pose besides his fancy bicycle” (Oct. 11th). These gunman images gave him that larger-than-life persona seen in so many film western stars. However, silver screen cowboy heroes are definitely not short, so it makes sense that Henzell would change this fact in his retelling. The retelling also dilutes some of the very real consequences of this kind of gunman posing. Generally this posturing is a mere impersonation or mask of impenetrability. But in the end, we see that the myth is not as bulletproof as it is made out to be.

The police finally caught up with the real Ivan on October 11, 1948.

That Monday, *The Gleaner's* headlines read:

Closing Chapters In The Six-Week Man-Hunt That Ended At Lime Cay

'RHYGING' BURIED IN PAUPERS' LOT

IVANHOE ("RHYGING") MARTIN, two-gun/ killer who died, as he began – in a blaze of revol-/ver shots – was buried at dawn yesterday morning/ in the Paupers' lot at the May Pen Cemetery. . . .

Thus ended the short and bullet-scarred career of a young man who/ thought he could out-gun and out-wit the police, and whose diabolical/ deeds, over a period of six weeks provided the most amazing chapters/ in local criminal history.

Time of burial was 6:30 o'clock. But before the body left the/ city morgue, at 6:20 o'clock yesterday, another, and perhaps the last,/ dramatic episode in the career of the killer was enacted when Eric/ ("Mossman") Goldson, one of the men who were marked for death by/ Martin, visited the morgue to have a look at his body.

Mossman rode to the mortuary on his bicycle. He entered the gates,/ walked down the pathway to the building. Since noon on Saturday he/ had been trying to get a look at the man who was once his friend, and/ afterwards his foe. He asked the policeman present if he could see/ "Rhyging." . . .

"I want to see him," he said. "I want to see him dead."

Permission was given. Rhyging's body was then in the coffin,/ but the top was not then on. Mossman went up and looked at the/ corpse for a long minute.

When he turned away he was smiling, and those near him/ heard him say:

"The race is not to the swift, Rhyging, you gone at last." (Oct. 11th)

The story comes full circle as Eric Goldson, who allegedly "stooled" on the real Ivan, resurfaces in the end to exact a different kind of revenge. As Goldson begs to see the real Ivan's dead body, looking at real masculinity takes on a different meaning in this moment. He wants to see the human form to confirm that the myth is dead. However, Goldson's friend, Ms. Tibby Young, unfortunately cannot do the same. She is sacrificed in the name of another kind of looking. As the real Ivan looks for Goldson, her life ends to confirm the myth – the myth of who is the tougher man; her body sacrificed in the name of masculine performance. Additionally, both Ivans die holding onto this myth. More importantly, the political jingoism of 1970s Jamaica ended many lives in the name of similar myths. What do we do with that fact that this myth is heavily steeped in the mythology of the Western's cowboy, keeping in mind that it is a specific ideology about *white* masculinity? However because even the white men were performing a mythic masculinity, the audience is implicated in these cycles of looking as well.

Susan Hayward explains that the west was not “won” as the Western myth would have us believe. “It was taken away from the Indians by the ‘few’ property speculators, and what was left over from the good gold-mining terrain and profitable land . . . was sold to the beleaguered pioneers who had come so far for so little” (413). However, she points out that “Audiences wanted to see the west as it should have been, that is as myth” (413). Therefore, she says, formulaic rituals were created in Westerns to help counter the fear of lost mastery and control:

. . . (we know this is not the truth, it is myth, but we keep going back to see it because we want it to be so). The narrative rituals of robbery, chase and retribution, of lawlessness and restoration of law, are iconographically inscribed in the western, right down to the very last detail and gesture. Attacks are repeated in different ways. The stage-coach chase is replaced by the wagon-train attack, the train robbery, the cavalry charge or the Indians swooping down on ‘innocent’ homesteaders. . . . The ritual gunfight (in or out of the saloon), the pushing through the saloon swing-doors and swagger up to the bar – all are images that we immediately associate with the genre. All, of course, constitute a massive cover-up of how the west was colonized in the name of capitalism. (413)

This idea of myths as cover-up is key because we must always remember that these are performances of masculinity often covering up vulnerabilities.

Additionally, when they are translated into real life, this ritualized performance of cowboy masculinity often has deadly consequences. This is interesting given the fact that the word "cowboy" also has negative connotations, describing "a reckless person who ignores potential risks" (*American Heritage* 321)².

Looking at cowboys through this lens of impulsivity and violence gives *The Harder They Come* a more somber significance. In their *Gleaner* article, "Still relevant after three decades" Bruce Alexander and Omar Francis touch on this sentiment. They describe the film as "an uncompromising/ look at how the system that prevails in/ our society can corrupt and pervert the/ hopes and dreams of our people." They also see another equally disturbing message: "the possibility of/ real, fundamental change for the poor-/ people of Jamaica . . . is still just a pretty illusion,/ not unlike the flickering images on a/ movie screen" (Nov. 25, 2007, p. F8). While they may be talking primarily about a socio-economic system, I would argue that the corruption also stems from these narrow cowboy definitions of masculinity. This stagnation rests in the culture of copying and on the recycling of limited representations. How these constructs intersect with what is real and what is fiction brings us to the translations of these same myths into fictional accounts – yet another layer of looking.

² For example, see Mike Allen and Romesh Ratnesar's *TIME Magazine's* cover article referring to George W. Bush's foreign policy as "Cowboy Diplomacy."

CHAPTER TWO

The Harder They Come: Literary Version

Behold my people: How violence does enfold them like a mantle. It sitteth upon their shoulders even as a garment.

Book of Lamentations

Jah Version

(9, italics in original)

Thus opens Michael Thelwell's 1980 novel *The Harder They Come*. The epigraph comes from the Book of Lamentations and feels like a lament in and of itself. Spoken as if with a remorseful shake of the head, it begins with "Behold my people" – an insider getting ready to share insights. "How violence does enfold them like a mantle. It sitteth upon their shoulders even as a garment." Given the legacy of colonialism, it is fair to argue that one of the legacies is a legacy of brutality. This is not to say that violence did not exist in African countries, but to acknowledge the history of brutal terror wrought on African bodies throughout the period when Jamaica (and the rest of the Caribbean) was colonized. More importantly, as Frantz Fanon says, "decolonization is always a violent phenomenon" (*Wretched* 35). And sadly, "The colonized man will first manifest this aggressiveness which has been deposited in his bones against his own people (*Wretched* 52). In this sense, the

descendants of enslaved Africans in Jamaica have inherited a mantle of violence.

In the film *The Harder They Come*, this inheritance is filtered through the (Spaghetti) Western. Real/reel men solve their problems with gun violence. Not only do Westerns convey a particular type of mythic masculinity, as we saw in the last chapter, they have a particular relationship to violence that ties them to colonialism in more subtle ways. Ifeona Fulani explains the paradox in her article about the film:

Henzell's adaptation of the tropes of the western to his film project is profoundly ironic; as Robert Stam and Ella Shohat explain, *the narrative embedded in the western is one of conquest, genocide and imperialism . . .* While Ivan and an audience of poor Jamaicans watch a western in a Kingston cinema, the western enacts its metonymic significance as the means by which American products, cultural forms and consumer desires are absorbed into their imaginations and into their lives (Fulani 3, emphasis added).

If the Western is a narrative of conquest, genocide and imperialism, the descendants of the formally enslaved Africans have merely shed one colonial mantle for another. Even if this stylistic adoption of the Western was a rebellious move of self-determination for various men or, as Norman Stolzoff says, an "attempt to carve out a cultural style that rejected the society's dominant cultural mold" (82), it is still a style that hinges on the covert disdain for an Other. More ironically, in Westerns that Other is generally

people of color. Manifest Destiny is the 19th century belief that the US expansion across western territories was necessary, inevitable and ultimately positive. Although this expansion ravaged indigenous communities, Hollywood tells a different tale. Charles Ramírez Berg explains the sanitized version on the silver screen that Ivan would have been watching: “Viewed from this perspective, Hollywood films, particularly those about the ‘winning of the west,’ proselytized Manifest Destiny, simplifying and organizing the experience into a coherent conquest myth that recounted the ‘crusade’s’ exploits in epic, God’s-on-our-side, happy-ending fashion” (3). Therefore, adopting an identity built around the model of the Western will logically result in conquest against people of color. In the case of Ivan and postcolonial communities of color, this ultimately means adopting a self-defeating and hollow persona. Considering Fanon’s argument that one of the first places formally colonized communities turn their violence is on their own people (which will have more serious implications in chapter four), this quest for self-definition/determination is even more tied up in violent self-destructive confrontation where the gun held is ultimately pointed at yourself.

Given the centrality of the Western to the film and the centrality of violence to the Western and masculinity, it makes sense that any novel inspired by the film *The Harder They Come* would deal with these issues. What might not make sense is why the novel was created *after* the film instead of the usual novel-to-film process. Part of the reason lies in the

film's wild international and local popularity, and part of the reason lies in a Jamaican community's hunger for accurate images of themselves. This idea of looking at yourself, whether on screen or in print, hints at a powerful process. Seeing a portrayal of your life can be both self-affirming (like hearing/seeing your language spoken by main characters) and contradictory (as we see in the idea of post-colonial subjects imitating Westerns). When the previous administration's ban of the film was finally lifted by Michael Manley's administration in 1972, Jamaican audiences flocked in record numbers. Michael Thelwell recalls, the "crowds were unprecedented in size and fervor, [with] lines of people completely encircling the theater" (178 Cham). He continues discussing its popularity in Western countries,

. . . where it was said to be receiving "cult status" among the young and within the "counter culture," [yet he] felt that response to be quite pallid compared to the intensity and passion of audiences in the Caribbean and Africa – among the people who were, in the largest sense, the film's subjects and who recognized their lives in its portrayals. (178 Cham)

As demonstrated in chapter one, the portrayals in the screen version of *The Harder They Come* deliver a clear message around what makes a real/reel Jamaican man. At the end of the film, we as audience are invested in how cars, guns and violence contribute to potent performances

of masculinity. With its translation into another medium, it is necessary to see whether those same messages exist. Is the novel different from the film? Close analysis of key scenes will help us sort out the answer.

From Film to Novel

As we see in the epigraph, Michael Thelwell frames the literary telling of Ivan's story under the shroud of violence: "How violence does enfold them like a mantle. It sitteth upon their shoulders even as a garment" (9). Additionally, this is violence that we know is intertwined with reel masculinity. But what will *reel* masculinity look like on *real* paper? How will the images from the film be transferred to the printed page? What will the markers of masculinity be in a book? Before answering any of these questions, let us first look at how the actual novel-writing process began.

An editor from Grove Press approached Thelwell in 1978 to make a "novelization" of the film. Thelwell originally declined for reasons that he calls "at once technical – in an aesthetic sense – and political" (176 Cham). Citing what he saw as an inevitable "trivilization" and cultural cannibalism of a film that he (and the public) loved, "our first Jamaican feature film," he wanted no part of it (176, 178 – 179 Cham). He questioned how the images and sounds would transfer to the page and wondered about the book's potential audience (since the film had English subtitles). However, both the

founder and chief editor of Grove Press at the time stressed that they saw a certain thematic universality that needed to be told. What they called the “Third World reality” of “urban migration and cultural dislocation” would make a fictional version of the film “commercially viable” (180 Cham). Since these themes connected with Thelwell’s private desires of writing a novel about working-class Jamaica, he eventually conceded. Yet in the Author’s Preface Thelwell says, “this book is not a ‘novelization’ of the filmscript” (7). While he of course credits the film with being the “inspiration” for the novel, he is careful to add that simply “adding chunks of narrative and description to a film’s dialogue, does not . . . result in a novel” (7). It was important to him to make a piece of art that could stand on its own with characters and a storyline as complex and nuanced as the characters from the film. He was also well aware of the visual and audio advantages that film has over the printed page. Add that onto the fact that he wanted to do justice to the spoken beauty of Jamaican creole and simultaneously reach those same creole speakers who were an audience historically written off as not interested in reading. He saw it as a rare opportunity to combat the “hege(de)monic intent” “cultural chauvinism” and “psychic mugging” enacted first by Eurocentric canonical standards (187 Cham). It was a unique gift to be in such a position: “the exploration of the vast, unmined wealth of our cultural inheritance, the exhilarating challenge represented by a potential audience with a profound, even visceral need to encounter and engage those accessible,

authentic, and transforming visions of their own presence and experience in the world that only literature can provide" (188 Cham). In the end, Thelwell hoped to create the novel "from which the film might have been derived were the process reversed" (190 Cham). In other words, not just "a novel *about* Jamaica but a *Jamaican* novel . . . [that would be] an artifact deriving naturally and organically out of the cultural sensibilities, references, experiences, and political perceptions of the people, recognizably anchored in their historical experiences, and expressed in a language informed by the metaphors, imagery, proverbial lore, narrative forms, styles, and traditions of the indigenous culture" (190 Cham). With the book's critical acclaim and multiple printings, he more than succeeded. Moreover, it is testament to what he calls the "honorable work left for the novel in our constituency" (208 Cham). Thelwell sees black novelists as part of an artistic resistance movement, creating new books that are . . .

. . . our own: firmly anchored in recognizable reality, resonant with the music of our cultures, informed by the ironies of our histories, respectful of the readers, clear without being simple-minded, every bit as serious and complex as the realities it presents without pretentiousness and self-importance. And, having created them, our task will be producing them in such a manner as not to render them a luxury completely beyond the people's means. (209 Cham)

This “Jamaican novel” would indeed feel familiar. It would feel almost like it was being spoken by an intimate friend and we, as reader-audience, would recognize the sign-posts of national identity. Things such as the language, landscape and characters add to this feeling of authenticity, but do the same messages from the film about masculinity exist in the novel? I believe that part of the reason that the novel feels like a “Jamaican novel” is because of the way masculinity is performed and because of the lessons that Ivan receives about what makes a real man. Turning to the novel itself will help clarify this point.

The Novel Itself: Differences

The first noticeable difference between film and novel is the generous addition of a back story. With the luxury of space and lyrical description not easily captured in a film, Thelwell begins the anchoring he speaks of above with Ivan’s childhood. Instead of seeing a young man sitting on a bus heading to Kingston, Thelwell takes us back to Ivan’s childhood in a countryside community that is steeped in purposeful history:

Between the various homesteads a network of footpaths and trails wound its intricate way, connecting homes and farms into a human community. The forest, that apparently random jungle, was in reality a testament to human tenacity and labor. . . . The mountain valleys with the strong life-giving sun, heavy rains, and rich deep earth had been

there fallow and waiting, it seemed, for them. And they had come – Akan, Ashanti, Yoruba, Mandingo, Wolof, Ibo, and Bantu . . . They came with their ancient tools and processes, bring the foods they knew and their animals . . . and their sense of life and community, their songs, stories, and dances, and their sensitivity to life and respect for age and for manners. There on the steep sides of the valley all were transplanted and all grew and prospered. (15)

This is a community drenched in ordered meaning. While there is an ancestral path here that traces all the way back to slavery, it is not a tracing of defeat or inferiority. Instead it is a bright and sturdy line drawn from West African kingdoms to Jamaican dignity, tenacity and respect. More importantly, this community did not just exist in these hills – they *prospered*. Ivan is “not yet twelve years old” when we meet him in this tight-knit community, living with his grandmother Miss ‘Mando (Miss Amanda Martin) whose “father was a maroon-man” (75). Like their neighbors, they live a modest but comfortable life, growing their own food in a nearby plot of land and keeping each other company. After losing four sons to various forms of migration away from the land, he is the last living family member that she knows apart from her daughter (Ivan’s mother) who lives in Kingston. Miss ‘Mando regularly hopes that Ivan will stay and carry on their family legacy of farming.

At the last second the parrakeet [sic] cut sharply, looking slow and awkward. The hawk veered, extended talons hammering the smaller bird. Then everything was blurred in whirling wings and a puff of green feathers. There was a loud shriek, abruptly ended by the flash of the great acipitor's head striking down with a vicious jab, and then the predator spread its wing against the updraft and went into a long, swift glide just above the trees and down into the valley; then it pulled out of the glide and with powerful strokes started climbing toward its nest on the mountaintop. . . .

Ivan felt a little weak. It had all been terrible and beautiful in all its terribleness. "Yes'm. Don't we did see it?"

"We see ol' hawk ketch 'im. But is 'fraid kill 'im. If 'im did stay in the guava trees wid the rest of 'im generation dem, the hawk never coulda catch 'im. But is 'fraid 'im afraid cause 'im to fly out. You see?"

Ivan saw. It must have been terrible to sit there watching the shadow of death circling over, hearing that grating scream until you couldn't stand it anymore, couldn't force yourself to sit still any longer, until nerve and control went and panic took over. Yes 'fraid can kill you. (42)

One of Ivan's first childhood lessons is ironically about birds yet not about birds. This is a lesson about fear, power and masculinity. His grandmother lets him know that being afraid can get you killed so it is not a healthy

emotion to have – especially as a young man. Without fear you will have more power and control. At the same time, staying close to your community will enable you to ultimately survive and prosper as many generations before Ivan have done. Essentially striking out on your own makes you susceptible to whatever metaphorical hawk circles around your community borders waiting to catch you.

Ivan's second lesson comes during Maas' Nattie's "shelling match." Economic survival spawns community events around projects that need the help of many hands, such as clearing land or digging trenches or reaping a crop. A shelling match centers around reaping the corn harvest. This means "shelling" or stripping the kernels off individual cobs of corn (47). With all of Maas' Nattie's land and corn fields, this means an all-day affair with food, drink and stories with the neighborhood's men, women and children. The narrator tells us that young Ivan loves shelling matches, enjoying "the warmth and sense of community and the stories, which no matter how often they were heard never seemed to get stale" (48). One of his favorites is a tragic song about a young policeman named Roy Maragh. Roy had been the victim of "some injustice by his officers, [and] had brooded on the wrong" (49). Now the community sings about what happened to him. The tune is described this way:

It was a slow melancholy song telling how he decided that only blood could discharge the dishonor to his name and manhood. It described in detail how he got his pistol and

*That young policeman
with revolver in hand
Sought out those who had done
Him a wrong.*

Ivan sang lustily. His flesh crawled with shame when the injustice was done. His spirit soared as Roy walked through the police station on a Christmas morning, shooting his tormentors. His heart sank as the last sad verses – describing how Roy was hung high on a gallows as the sun came up – and the last solemn dirgelike notes hovered in the night air. (49, emphasis in original)

Like the lesson about the parakeet, the lesson here is deeper than the events on the surface. It is less about revenge and more about violence as the only legitimate way to reclaim manhood. Young Ivan soaks it in and identifies with Roy who he comes to know as a kind of hero. More importantly, from the way songs operate in this community we know that Roy was most likely a real person:

There was a song for every major tragedy of that sort. Very soon after the event a music man would come through the district, singing the song that preserved the story, and selling printed copies of the words

for two pence. Soon that song too would be a part of the communities' repertoire and thus part of the legend of the land. (49)

Here oral history becomes written story becomes community memory.

Therefore the lessons of how real men act do not just live on in Ivan's mind.

There is community investment in a particular kind of manhood for the songs were always tragic (always about a real event) and all end the same way:

"Young women would become tearful as the handsome, brave young heroes ended up on the gallows, which it seemed most of them tended to do" (49).

Why are *these* the events important enough to turn into song? Why could an alternative version of manhood not be the one heralded and frozen into generations of community oral memory? Perhaps because they are balanced with the alternative models of masculinity that come up in some of the community stories.

One such story is shared at the shelling match later that night and serves as Ivan's third lesson. It is a "problem story in which the audience would have to decide what the wise and just ending should be" (50). Ivan likes "problem stories" the best out of them all and listens intently as one of the elders tells the story of a king and his pretty and impertinent daughter. The king announces that any man that can catch a wild bull with nothing other than his bare hands can marry his daughter because "Any man who can tame wild bull can tame [her]" (50). Although none of the men in their community accept, two strong and attractive brothers eventually come for the

challenge. Two weeks pass and everyone thinks they are both dead, but one day one of the men stumbles back to the town badly scratched and battered to explain what happened:

‘. . . Ah know Ah don’t ketch the bull but is over a hundred mile I run ‘im. Ah run through bush. Ah swim over river. Ah run up mountain. Ah run down mountain. But Ah couldn’ ketch him. The las’ Ah see the bull, ‘im an’ me breddah drop down over a cliff. Both a dem *mus*’ dead. So since me don’t love dead, me turn back. And since is only me lef’, I claim the gal.’ (50, emphasis in original)

The king and his people all agreed that this seemed like the closest anyone would get to meeting the challenge alive so they announced their marriage and began the celebratory feast. And even though it was an arranged marriage, the daughter was pleased with and attracted to the choice of the younger brother. As everyone is eating, drinking and dancing, the older brother amazingly appears with a shout. Joe Beck continues telling the story in the older brother’s voice:

‘Not a man eat, not a man drink. Ah say not a food taste, not a rum drink. I come to claim mi wife.’

“Everybody frighten an’ look up an’ what you think dem see? Dem doan see a t’ing but the older breddah. An’ ‘im was a big, strapping, tallowah [sturdy, muscular, aggressive] black man. ‘Im clothes tear off ‘im, an’ ‘im body chopup-chopup all over like somebody take machete

an' cut 'im. An' 'im wrapup in a bloody bullskin with the head an' the tail still pon it, want to favor Joncunnu [John Canoe: masked dancer with a bull's head]

'Unu say whosoever ketch the bull supposed to get her and see it yah...is me ketch the bull.'

"So the king him say, 'Is true I did say dan an' Ah can't break me word. But see the trouble yah, me done already tell you brother say him can get mi daughtah. You see, we all t'ink say you dead. Is almost a month now an' you no come back.'

'Well Ah come back now. An' Ah want mi wife.' . . . (51)

With this new twist, everyone in the audience is hanging onto Joe Beck's words as he continues dramatizing the king's decision:

After a lengthy consultation the father came back and addressed the three. He told the daughter to cease weeping and to remember that it was her haughtiness and foolish pride that had brought them to this predicament. Then he addressed the brothers. He told them that the entire town was impressed with worth and valor. The younger one had chased the animal longer than anyone else. Thus they knew that he was strong, determined, and loved their daughter. But having subjected himself in distress and without hope of success he had turned back, as who wouldn't? Thus he had proved himself to be

human, with human failings. But in turning back he had not completed the task, and had therefore failed.

The older brother on the other hand would not accept defeat. With a fanatic singlemindedness, no doubt inspired by love, and with a strength and endurance that was greater than anything in living memory, he had persisted and ultimately succeeded, nearly killing himself in the process. It was a deed that would live forever in legend and song, bringing perpetual credit to his name and the memory of his fathers. Here the father took up a bag of money and, as though at a signal, his young men – all armed with machetes – casually drew near. He told the victorious brother, that the wealth and fame he had won would be his reward, but he was to take it and leave immediately and never return, for a man like him, *loved strongly and hated even more so*. He had demonstrated that once his mind was set on an idea no suffering, privation, *not even death itself could sway him*. It was awesome but it was inhuman. Every married couple had their fights; every family their disagreements. If the king gave his daughter to him he would live in fear for her safety and worse, would know that there was no reasoning with him. (52 – 53)

This is a mythic type of masculinity. Not only had the older brother gone over a cliff with the bull, he eventually killed and skinned the bull, and survived to tell about it all. Even if he had not survived, he was definitely not afraid to

pursue his ultimate goal and as we see, “not even death could sway him” (53). Joe Beck continues the story, naming a different kind of strength in the younger brother unseen to the naked eye:

On the other hand the younger brother was a man like them – brave enough but *with limitations and frailties*. Such a one could be lived with, but there was no living with a man whose will knew neither fear nor limits. He should take his money and his fame and go his way. The elder brother sprang to his feet, looked at the young men’s machetes, at the bag of money, and at the weeping girl. Without a word he left, taking nothing but the bloody hide. (50 – 53, emphasis added)

Taking only the bull hide gives the sense that the elder brother is above the carnal desires of regular men. If not even *death* could sway him, the same could be said about money – with such mythic qualities, it is no surprise that he would leave it. He already represents “strength and success” (52). This seems principled and fair to the elders in the community, but young Ivan is furious:

Ivan was on his feet, inarticulate and stuttering from his sense of outraged justice. His fury was focused on Joe Beck, who regarded him with a tolerant smile. “Dat wrong... You is a wicked man. Is not justice dat.”

“Ah, mi son,” Joe Beck said. “You young but you wi’ see. If you was a king or a faddah you would see different. Justice is not a straight

t'ing you know, is a crooked and curvy t'ing. It have to twis' an turn and ben' up . . . to get to where it mus' get to." . . .

Where was the justice in that story? . . . It woulda did serve dem all right if the older brother did come back by night an' burn the town down like Samson an' the Philistine corn. (53 – 54)

Ivan is clearly upset by this outcome. Justice for him is not “a crooked curvy t'ing” but instead a straightforward, right-from-wrong, black-and-white decision. If the elder brother met the terms of the challenge, he should win the “prize.” But what is more interesting is that this outcome leaves Ivan upset about something that runs deeper than just the story:

Anyway, he reflected angrily, he didn't really like shelling matches: too much woman and pickney and petty talk. Bet you if it was a digging match nobody would agree with such a decision. But those were men's events, when new land had to be cleared and plowed by hand. No woman, pickney or old man, but only strong young man dem who could work hard, hard. (54)

Why would the omniscient narrator now say that Ivan does *not* like shelling matches when just a few moments earlier, the narrator's words were precisely that “Ivan liked shelling matches.” We are even told that he was taken with everything from “the warmth and sense of community [to the] the stories” (48). So why this change now?

If we look back to when the narrator tells us that Ivan liked shelling matches, we see that it is when the community was getting ready to sing “Ivan’s favorite” song about the young vengeful police officer whose manhood had been dishonored by his colleagues. Part of the song reminds us that he “Sought out those who had done/Him a wrong” (49). He was wronged and he took bloody (but justifiable in Ivan’s eyes) retribution. Even though he was hung in the end, we must remember that Ivan’s “spirit soared” when officer Roy shot his “tormentors” in the police station on Christmas day (49). Now when the narrator tells us “he didn’t really like shelling matches” it is after a story about a man who wins out because of his “limitations and frailties” – stereotypically female attributes. In Ivan’s mind, the brother who exhibited brute strength is the just winner, the only winner. He even wishes the older brother would have come back to burn down the town – exact revenge, like officer Roy, on “those who had done/Him a wrong” (54, 49). The story’s verdict even converts the shelling match that Ivan previously enjoyed into a feminized space with “too much woman and pickney and petty talk” (54). Although still a young *boy* at this point in the novel, Ivan clearly positions himself alongside the young *men*. He firmly believes that if he were in the proper company of a men’s event, such as a digging match where “only strong young man dem who could work hard, hard” the story’s ending would be challenged.

There is a lenience and softness in compromise that does not fit into Ivan's definition of what a real man is. Even when the narrative gives him this alternative model, he rejects it. The older people in the community accept it because "Age had taught them that a spirit of compromise, to bite one's tongue, to 'take low,' to be flexible, was the most important quality that life taught if one was to live in human society" (53). But for Ivan, real men look like officer Roy and the older brother leaving the money and taking the bull hide (and clearly his dignity in Ivan's mind). Therefore, the unreliability of the narrator here mirrors the mind of a fickle child who gets upset the moment things do not go his way. Because Ivan is a child at this point, this flip-flop reminds us that this is a tender period of socialization and young people can be easily swayed – liking one thing one minute and not liking it the next. Boys are in a particularly vulnerable position because society tells them that ideal manhood is derived from financial as well as physical obligations. In the face of poverty, financial obligations often cannot be met and this leads to not being seen as a man (even if the man is well into adulthood). Outside of the physical and financial definitions, Ivan is formulating what masculinity looks like to him and he clearly includes justice in the definition of "real" men.

This combination of masculinity and justice ironically takes us right back to the Western and its reliance on Manifest Destiny. Although this childhood section of the novel is a departure from the film, the undercurrent

theme of a hero seeking justice through violence is consistent with the film. These consistencies are woven throughout the rest of the novel in ways that complement the film's aforementioned scenes. Therefore, let us now turn to a few passages that do just that.

The Novel Itself: Similarities

Ivan drops out of school to tend the land and his animals, as well as spending time in his new guilty pleasure – hanging around Miss Ida's Rough Rider Café. It is the first café of the district where "some people went at night to drink rum and beer and to dance to calypso and other music that came over the music box" (24) much to the disapproval of the Christian members of the community (including his grandmother). After spending a stolen afternoon at Miss Ida's with one of his friends, Ivan knows that he wants to be in the world that she and that music represent:

The sweet rhythms of the drum and the intoxicating tunes raced around his head. He would be a singer of songs, a music-maker, a dancer. It was a strange and mysterious world, this city where such music came from. He didn't know how it would come about or when. Still he had been called. (30)

He buys a little transistor with most of the dollars Maas Naatie had been giving to his grandmother over the years in his name and becomes obsessed with the music that he hears through its tiny speakers. Even though there are

also Christian shows broadcast, his grandmother is disappointed that this is what he used the money for and wants no part of that “ungodly music” (61). She was all right with him dropping out of school to work the land because “she felt that too much education would serve to pull Ivan away from the land” (61). However, after seeing his fascination with the transistor as a signal that he would not be making his home in the country, Miss ‘Mando is devastated and slowly turns more and more feeble until her death at age 70.

Miss ‘Mando actually foresees the violence that we know peppers Ivan’s adult life in the film. When he finds her dead body, Ivan discovers that his grandmother is still holding a torn page from the Bible in her hand. When he scrambles through the night to tell Maas’ Nattie of her passing, Maas’ Nattie tries to decipher the possible message in Genesis 37 by lamplight. It is only at her funeral that we really know what she was brooding over when Mad Izaac channels her voice and mannerisms. Because it is connected to violence, it is worth brief mention here.

Izaac is the town’s madman who went to seminary as a bright youth with a promising future. He returns early a changed man. For almost a year after his puzzling return, he sits silently on a hill looking at the sea until he randomly starts clearing land with a machete one day. No one knows what happened to him at the seminary (and Izaac never talked about it), but he later begins to climb trees at night to howl at full moons and *certain* people’s deaths. When Miss ‘Mando dies he comes to howl in the trees outside of her

house the night of her death when no one but Ivan and Maas' Naatie knew of her passing. "BRIM STOOOONNAH ANNN' FIAYAH!" he shouts into the valley's night sky from the breadfruit tree outside of Miss 'Mando's house. While sitting with Ivan, Maas' Naatie says "'Ah was wondering if 'im would come'" (78). On the last night of the traditional Nine Night feast, the lead drummer at the "dance of the spirits" chooses Izaac as the last person "to 'carry' the spirit in the dance" (92). As Izaac enters the circle, he transforms into Miss 'Mando. She greets guests and thanks them for their kindness at her funeral ceremonies, then turns to her grandson through Izaac's body:

"Aaiee! Mi pickney, mi pickney. Mi pickney. Fire an' gunshat. Gunshat and bloodshed. Bloodshed and gunshat, waiee oh." The madman tore at his clothes and wept.

Then the voice, again cold and without emotion: "Behold dat dreamer cometh...let us take an' slay 'im...an' den we shall see...what shall become of his dreams. Yes, what shall become of his dreams....For behold your young men shall dream dreams and your young men shall see visions....Where dere is no vision the people perish...." (97)

This last portion is from the Bible page that she had in her hand on her death bed, Genesis 37. The full scriptural passage is about seventeen-year old Joseph who is the favorite of his father Jacob because he is the son had in his old age (like Miss 'Mando). His brothers hate him for being the favorite and

they conspire to kill him. One brother convinces the rest to throw him in a pit instead of killing him, but the others later sell him to merchants on their way to Egypt. When the one brother who wanted to spare his life comes back to the pit and discovers Joseph gone, he is unsure of what to do. The other brothers decide to slaughter a goat and dip Joseph's multicolored coat in it to bring to their father. When Jacob sees the bloody coat, he assumes an animal has killed his favorite son. He is inconsolable and declares that he will mourn Joseph's death until he dies. It is interesting that Jacob tears at his clothes in utter despair over his son's supposed violent death and Miss 'Mando tears at her clothes (as channeled through Izaac) as well. But she had been mourning Ivan's loss long before she passed as they grew further and further apart after he bought his transistor. In this way she is a lot like Jacob because they both believe that they will never see their sons again even though neither child is dead when this thought first occurs to them.

Ever since going to Miss Ida's café, Ivan has dreams of becoming a singer in town. However, his grandmother can clearly foresee that his dreams will not be realized and that moving to town will essentially slay him. Nevertheless, after Miss 'Mando dies Ivan is determined to go to town. Eventually riding on the bus to Kingston (where the film begins), Ivan remembers some of Maas' Nattie's final words: "Yes, you jus' a dead fe somebody call you man, eh? Well you gettin' dere, me lad, you getting' dere. You live long enough, everyt'ing wi' happen to you" (112). But from the film,

we know that Ivan is impatient for things to happen to him sooner rather than later. He is a young man holding firmly to an image of manhood rooted in youth, strength and justice. It is no surprise then that Thelwell creates distinct scenes around this particular version of masculinity – a version of masculinity that mirrors the “reel” models seen in the film.

Like the country green mango riding the bus in the film, Ivan in the novel is anxious to start a new life in a city that has only lived in his mind. Fed by days of listening to his transistor, Ivan creates a fantasy of what life must be like, becoming the dreamer that his grandmother called him. The epigraph of the chapter when he goes to town is an excerpt from that Genesis passage: “*Behold that dreamer cometh...*” (103, italics in the original). And the chapter title itself, “City Bwai Version” is a nod to the soundtrack in the film. Because the soundtrack was such a large part of the film experience, Thelwell adds the word “version” to many of his chapter and section titles, such as “Village Bwai Version” and “Nine Night Version.” “Version” refers to the instrumental side of a 45rpm record, and also legitimizes the multiple influences in the story of Ivan’s life – everyone has a version in the making and in the telling of the legend of Rhygin. It is interesting aside, however, that while the film never uses the nickname Rhygin, the novel does. Thelwell connects to the real life story of Ivanhoe Martin by christening the fictional Ivan with the real nickname during childhood. His playmates give him the name, but Miss ‘Mando wondered how they picked it:

Where they get such a name for Ivan, like Rhygin? Did they really know what it mean? It wasn't a word you heard so much any more, only from old people. Raging, strong but foolish too, overconfident, not knowing where the limits were. Hmm, maybe the pickney did say true, the bwai had something in him that was rhygin. (20)

And now this bundle of overconfident strength wrapped in inexperienced curiosity rides the bus:

Excitement flooded him: he was really on his way to Kingston, at last, to a place of excitement, of possibility; to a great unknown future where anything could happen. What was it really like? He had no clear picture, only a vague image of broad streets, grand houses of stone, glass and brick, and stores in which wonders were to be had, money in large quantities and dance halls, and all just waiting for him. (113)

Ivan's dreams echo the grandiose expectations of so many Caribbean immigrants to places such as England and New York. Expecting streets lined with gold, their historical experiences are generally sobering tales of disappointment, discrimination and substantially harder work than was imagined [note Gmelch]. In this regard, Ivan's naïveté is sad because we are well aware of his film life of initial hardships. We also know from the film that Ivan becomes a blank canvas of vulnerability upon arrival. He is stripped of his belongings and turned away from his mother's house, wandering into the world to create a city version of himself. In the novel, the "City Bwai

Version" chapter captures the details of Ivan's bus ride into town that would be far too extensive for the film. Thewell turns this journey into an event and uses the luxury of the printed page to paint a picture of comical characters, from the East Indian bus driver "the legendary 'Coolie Man' or 'Coolie Duppi,' so-called because people swore that only powerful supernatural aid could account for the many accidents from which he had walked away", to his assistant "'Drunk A'ready' who served as loader, collector of fares and enforcer of order" (105). The novel also gives us a sense of what it must be like for an expectant country boy to be coming to the big city of his dreams for the first time by including Ivan's interior thoughts as his dreams meet reality out the bus window:

Buildings line the road on both sides. They were a disappointment to Ivan: worn wood and cement structures, they seemed in need of paint and were certainly no larger or finer than those of the small towns they had passed. They were only more and closer together.

. . . It all seemed overwhelming, out of control – the throngs lining the road, the noisy traffic, sometimes jammed bumper to bumper and barely moving, then suddenly in chaotic motion as though racing to the next jam-up. (121)

In the novel, there is no one car like the Mustang or the white convertible that Ivan fixates on in the film. Instead that fixation becomes subsumed under a theme of general acceleration and Ivan is impressed with the bustle of traffic,

daring of cyclists and the all around speed of city activity. But unlike the film, Thelwell also inserts Ivan's first sighting of Rastamen. Riding by as a band of bicyclists with red, gold and green banners, they are chanting in unison and Ivan is reminded of Maas' Nattie's stories of powerful black Maroon warriors and he feels a sense of pride. When another passenger dismisses them as nothing but "ol' dutty criminal dem" Ivan feels that there is something disrespectful in the ensuing laughter. This is a model of masculinity that he does not quite understand but that he still associates with dignity and reverence. Its presence complicates the definition of city masculinity but is nevertheless fleeting as they are gone out of sight as quickly as they appeared. Therefore, even though these alternative references are with him psychically their physical presentations are not presented as viable alternatives because when we see Rastamen again, they are jokes or folkloric sightings. This is primarily because Ivan is ultimately looking to emulate the images of powerful masculinity that he associates with officer Roy and the elder brother with the bull hide in the stories from his childhood.

When Ivan finally gets off the bus, Thelwell translates the chaotic scene of overwhelming sights from the movie into feelings of anxiety happening in Ivan's mind along with the assault on all of his senses. Thelwell captures the chaos with descriptive language: "Now, at the point of stepping down, of actually entering and becoming a part of that crowded confusion, he felt isolated and apprehensive" (123). Off the bus there is "dust and reflected

glare", "the din of the crowd," "pounding bass rhythms," "quarrels," "amorous suggestions," and the rattle, roar and honking of traffic all around (124 – 125). Ivan is still a green mango at this point in the film and Thelwell keeps this vulnerability intact in the novel. Winston still steals his belongings and runs off through all of the traffic, and Ivan still makes it to his mother's house. But instead of Jose and the domino-playing group of men directing him to his mother's, Ivan approaches a group of women sitting in their doorways in the novel. They regard him suspiciously at first but then are all too glad to know that she is his mother. "Oh, you is Daisy pickney? Me nevah know. She going to glad to see you" (133). This female moment of softening is a better precursor to his visit because it is his symbolic re-entry to her womb and then re-birth.

With the luxury of text, Thelwell takes the opportunity to fill in Miss Daisy's life a little before Ivan comes to the door and we find out that she is a "fatigue-wracked" domestic with aching knees, back and shoulders (134). She disdainfully remembers the mistress of the household accusing her of stealing food and falls into a fitful sleep, irritated by the idea that she would even need to steal – especially with all the "food deh at mi maddah yard" (135). After Ivan's nervous calls wake her and she lets him in, their exchange is similarly awkward as in the film. However, in the novel she feeds him some sardines before he leaves. She also warns him that town seduces everyone into believing they can make it big: ". . . no so aall a dem say, all de young

bwai dem. Likkle more you see dem gone a jail, gone a *gallows*. Dead a gun' shot, dead a knife woun', or dem tu'n drunkard" (138, italics in original).

After giving him Preacher's information, she offers him some of the money that he just gave her but he does not take it. Instead he leaves the cramped room to walk over to Jose and his friends still playing dominoes in the alley.

In the film, the transition from his mother's space to Jose is done with shots of Ivan walking back down the dark alley approaching the men playing dominoes. I argue that in the film this walk essentially represents Ivan being reborn into a city version of himself and that there will be several masculinizing events that shape his development into a reel/"real" man.

Thelwell also picks up on the importance of how leaving his mother's space symbolizes a transition to manhood, but he describes it in a different way. As soon as Ivan steps outside of his mother's door in the novel, his maleness literally comes alive:

The air – warm, dark, and rich with the smell of cooking, fragrant woodsmoke, and from somewhere the sweet smell of ganja – caressed Ivan's skin sensuously. . . . From a neighboring tenement a song came from out of the darkness, a woman's voice, deep-throated and husky with sex. A man's voice said something indistinguishable. The woman laughed, a pleased teasing laugh.

. . .The warm breeze that touched his body brought also the murmur of the woman's low voice. A radio played softly. Ivan felt

wistful, alone in the darkness, lonely in a way he had never known. A rush of blood-heat pulsed through his limbs and filled his head, then settled in his loins. He felt himself hardening, growing long, throbbing with almost painful urgency. He had never felt a sexual longing so sharp and undirected, so needy. (140)

The city itself is like a woman, caressing Ivan's senses with various earthy smells, a sensual touch of breeze, and husky pleasurable sounds. This is a loneliness he has never known because he has heretofore been a child surrounded by adult community. This is the new individualized loneliness of a man-child out on his own for the first time. Because he is not a full-grown man yet at this point in the novel (or in the film), his longings in the novel are "undirected" and "needy." Basically, he does not yet know what "real" men are supposed to do and is in need of direction. Therefore, as he is certainly on his way to becoming a "real" man, he must undergo performance training as it were. To that end, Jose and his crew of friends are there to serve as masculinity guides and they remain a key catalyst in Ivan's growth/training throughout the novel.

Like the film, the novel portrays Ivan staring at Jose with admirable envy – *looking* at what *he* sees as an idealized version of himself. In the novel, Jose still represents the kind of masculinity that Ivan wants to emulate: "Maybe he could get to know them. Especially that tall flashy black one they called Jose, who seemed to be almost everything that Ivan aspired to become:

city-smart, stylish, self-assured" (140). So like the film scene, Ivan asks Jose about going to The Rialto and they eventually go after the same gentle teasing Jose gives him in the film. But without the fixation on cars from the film, the motorbike becomes the representative substitute. They go to The Rialto on Jose's motorcycle and it takes on the symbolic phallic power that cars represented in the film: "Intoxicated by speed and power, the bombardment of new sensations, and the smooth throbbing of the sleek machine between his legs, Ivan – nerves raw and tingling from technological overkill – cruised apparently cool as ice and laying easy" (143). Riding behind Jose, this scene has all the overtones of a new sexual experience. With such intense homoerotic focus on the phallus, it makes sense that they are on their way to look at the biggest penis of them all – the phallogentric Django and his big gun on The Rialto's screen:

A low, approving, anticipatory, visceral growl rose from the audience, becoming a joyous, hysterical, full-throated howl of release, of vindication and righteous satisfaction as Django, grim-faced and alone, the very embodiment of retribution and just vengeance, raked the masked killers, hot, bloody destruction spitting from the Gatling gun on his hip. Men were torn apart, picked up and flung to earth in grotesque spinning contortions. The giant bearded face, tight jawed, crazy eyed, each line and furrow magnified 100 times, glared out at the

audience, a powerful and primal force, an avenging angel in a sombrero. (149)

The violence and masculinity combine here on the novel's screen in a similar way that it did in the film's (double) screen. However, the novel again has the luxury of written description and Thelwell includes an important detail in his Rialto scene. When Ivan, Jose and friends get their tickets and go in, Ivan is beside himself with excitement to be in the famous Rialto theatre that he had read about in the country. However, when they sit in their seats he realizes that The Rialto is one more thing in the city that does not match up to its glittery reputation:

After they found some seats near the front he looked around with eager eyes and discovered to his shock that he wasn't in a building at all. There was no roof and when he looked up the moon was clearly visible coming from behind a cloud. He experienced a brief, unexamined sense of letdown, of being cheated. All that towering, gleaming exterior was just a big wall. (145)

The Rialto, the "marketplace of dreams" (143) is ultimately a façade. This accurately symbolizes how the dreams of many country travelers are dashed when they find the harsh realities of town, and it is *the* perfect place to house a display of performative masculinity. From the line outside amidst the posing young men and coquettish young women (143) to the crowd's jokes while they are seated (146), Ivan always watches Jose closely for clues on how

to be a “real” man – bringing us back to this idea of looking. In the pre-movie antics the entire audience is cracked up with laughter at an embarrassing moment between a man a woman and an enormous pair of underwear, but Ivan changes his demeanor to what seems to be the more appropriate reaction when he turns to his mentor: “Ivan immediately stopped laughing and tried to copy the bored indifference that Jose wore like a cape” (146). Jose is wearing a mask that Ivan wants to copy, but like *The Rialto*, Jose’s behavior is also a façade. Jose’s cape most likely encircles and shrouds his true inner feelings but Jose must maintain the outer performance to preserve his status as “real” man, or “*star-bwai*” which Jose defines as “a faceman [an attractive man] who ‘ave style . . . mouth, an’ heart” (153). When they finish watching this violent Spaghetti Western, Ivan has all of the ingredients needed for his imitative path to becoming a star-bwai:

The world of the movie was harsh and brutal, yes. But it was also one where *justice* once aroused, was more elemental and deadly than all the hordes of evil. He thought Maas’ Nattie would approve of such a world. (149, emphasis added)

Here we see Ivan holding onto this notion of violent masculinity being tied to justice invoking the calm benevolent spirit of his father figure Maas’ Nattie. However, this is a sense of dutiful justice (read Manifest Destiny) that is the underlying message of Westerns and we must remember Fulani’s caution that “the narrative embedded in the western is one of conquest, genocide and

imperialism.” This means that this kind of “harsh and brutal” justice will always be wrapped around violence. By extension an identity patterned after these silver screen heroes will also be filtered through the lens of violence – something Maas’ Nattie would most likely not approve.

In the film this identity patterning is clear as Ivan turns into a cowboy from beginning to end. Although there is a sense that he is a Robin Hood social bandit of the poor sufferahs that he ran with, a lot of the action in the film focuses on him as an individual; he is the single gun-slinger against the world. With the luxury of written text, Thelwell includes more of the collective experience. He expands the exploration of how Westerns affect male identity by developing the other young men in Ivan’s gang of friends a bit more. Thelwell is also more explicit about the connections that these young men hold in their hearts and minds for the form of the Western. This collectivity is important in the performance of masculinity because its meaning is created in concert with others. Masculinity ironically exists in contrast and comparison to what it is not. As Linden Lewis reminds us, “Masculinity is as much to do with what men do, how they behave in order to win the respect and honor of other men, as it is about winning the respect and admiration of women” (3, 2005). Yet even as Lewis makes this point, he reinscribes the notion that women are subordinate to men because the overall concern, as he explains it here, is about winning “respect and *honor*” from other men, but only “respect and *admiration*” from women. It is an ironic and

subtle distinction, but one that speaks volumes to the ways in which many communities socialize boys/men (and girls/women) in their respect roles. Given this powerful influence, Thelwell foregrounds the community in which Ivan would find himself.

Now committed to living in the city, despite the hardships he first encounters, Ivan is a regular movie-goer. In the film we only see Ivan attend one very influential film (Django) that is replayed in the final showdown of his own life, but in the novel Thelwell takes this very powerful trope and turns it into a living trajectory to reflect the lives of everyday Caribbean boys/men. If Ivan lives in Kingston and hangs out with a group of young men that he admires, participating in activities that he thoroughly enjoys, then he would not see one Western just once. Thelwell agrees and paints Ivan as an avid movie-goer in the novel, one who develops discerning preferences over time:

It wasn't long before his judgment matured and his taste became more selective. Gangster movies didn't appeal to him much, they seemed to lack the clean-cut heroism of the westerns. Of course there were certain names: Humphrey Bogart, Edward G. Robinson, Richard Widmark, Sidney Greenstreet, or George Raft, which evoked a certain style, a cynical tight-lipped toughness which he liked. But *in his innermost heart Rhygin was a cowboy. To miss a western almost any western, brought sadness and deprivation to his spirit.* (195, emphasis added)

He could not just be called “Ivan” in this list of “tight-lipped toughness” – Thelwell had to invoke his nickname of Rhygin. Let us remember that film Ivan is *never* called Rhygin although we know that Perry Henzell loosely built the film around the real Ivanhoe “Rhygin” Martin. By liberally using the nickname in the novel, Thelwell recalls this history in an explicit way. Additionally, by adding the nickname to a cast of real American actors known for their tough guy roles, it not only flirts with fact and fiction, it also connects the historical figure with a global legacy of toughness. It reminds us of how legendary that historical figure was/is for Jamaica. However, the irony behind all of these names is the fact that the American men are acting. They are performing characters that are different from themselves. The historical Rhygin was locked into a violent performance as well but he was essentially trying to play *himself* or a version of himself that he at least wanted the Jamaican public to believe. Similarly the novel’s Rhygin is also acting, but he is trying to play himself by creating a sense of “real” manhood out of the Hollywood images he sees at the movies. Thelwell makes him a cowboy at heart for whom missing any western, “brought sadness and deprivation to his spirit.” However, Thelwell adds a twist:

There were about ten, all about his own age. None . . . seemed to answer to the names their mommas gave them. They answered to the tough-sounding two syllable surnames that were the stock in trade of Hollywood press agents – names of consequence and with the right

resonances that could be spat out with sharp, dangerous inflections:
Bendix, Cagney, Bogart, Widmark. . . .

Their identification was with the actors, not with the characters they played who were obviously ephemeral and transitory. It was the ability of the actors that made the characters *bad* and which endured, so that arguments took place over whether Bogart was *badder* than Widmark. (199)

There is a distinction between fact and fiction with the focus on the actors themselves instead of their screen characters. Nevertheless, it is still the actors' performance ability that earns their respect so there is still a sense that the baddest of them all is better able to show/perform how "real"/"reel" men look. Ivan and his friends ignore the ephemeral fiction but it is the quality of the *performance* of that ephemeral fiction that makes the man underneath. The actor's reputation and manhood is based on this ironic sense of double-masking. Similarly, individual reputation is created out of ritualized performance among Ivan and his friends. There is a sense of order that guides their interactions and they follow respected routines that are also governed by performance:

The leaders ruled on the strength of their personalities and reputations – a mixture of wit and style, and a demonstrated willingness to beat down any challenge at whatever price. But actual violence was not nearly so frequent as the ritualistic gestures of challenge and

confrontation would suggest. So long as territorial imperatives and reputations were respected a tense, prickly, but surprisingly durable peace prevailed, most of the time. Against outside threats like the management, the police, or a gang from some other area, internal rivalries disappeared completely. (195)

The performance is what is most important here because going through the “ritualistic gestures of challenge and confrontation” is generally enough to thwart any real threats of violence. In these circles, reputation is built on the *performance* of cool toughness and mutual respect (like how they judge the Hollywood actors themselves) – who *looks* like a “real” man. Here again Thelwell explores this idea of performance and mutual respect:

It was here that Ivan’s education truly began. They lounged around the fire and talked knowingly and with a casual toughness and machismo of language that matched their *noms de guerre*. Their style was aggressive, their wit cynical, their bravado endless. With capricious dexterity they flashed their *okapis*, the ubiquitous, cheap German-made clasp knives known in the press as ratchet knives, the weapon of choice of the gulleys and slums. Honor demanded that even the slightest gesture of challenge, the faintest nuance of disrespect had to be met. But if you were fast enough with the humpbacked evil-looking blade, if you could flourish it with the stylish grace of a gunslinger twirling his six gun, that was frequently enough and the

actual *cutting* was unnecessary, was even regarded as a sign of oafishness. (199 – 200, italics in original)

The performance of their masculinity is preoccupied with language and style – remember Jose explains that a star-bwai is a faceman who has style, mouth (language) and heart presumably to challenge even “the faintest nuance of disrespect.” Even their knives become extensions of their bodies and both are to be handled effortlessly in times of confrontation; the menace of both (body and blade) supposedly able to ward off more serious confrontation. Honor in Ivan’s childhood stories is linked to violent revenge, a supposedly justifiable expression of force. However, with these young men still on their way to adulthood, honor is wrapped around the simple *threat* of violence – the dance of the okapi. This mimics the sense of dignified control that is often associated with Western heroes – the restraint of turning to violence as only a last resort. As we will see later, this stands in stark contrast to measuring masculinity against the ability to kill someone immediately and without hesitation. However, if the restraint is also balanced with an equal understanding that nuanced disrespect has to be swiftly met (along with overt disrespect), there is a sense of always being on guard, forever poised with muscles always flexed to defend oneself, one’s reputation and essentially one’s manhood. Rafael L. Ramírez discusses the implications of this vigilance as he sees it play out among Puerto Rican men:

Encounters between men are based on power, competition, and possible conflict. Of course, . . . the ability to have relationships involving camaraderie, cooperation, loyalty, and affection is not excluded; but the relationships occur within relationships of power, and it means putting those relationships before the game of power.

From childhood, one learns to demand respect, to respond to aggressive situations, to defend oneself both physically and verbally, and to demonstrate invulnerability, self-sufficiency, courage, and control. We grow up in an environment that demands constant affirmation of those defining attributes of our masculinity. Masculinity is very demanding. (58 – 59, emphasis added)

The demands are taught from small, the exhausting lessons around competition, aggression, invulnerability and self-sufficiency constantly hammered into acceptance. But Ivan and his friends do not appear outwardly exhausted by the demands of this performance. Even if they were uncertain about how well they could play the role, survival in the harsh city unfortunately demands that they at least look willing to meet the performance challenge and Ivan is certainly eager to try:

One thing [Ivan] knew, before he went back he would have to buy himself an *okapi*, a good one, something pretty and dangerous-looking, maybe a pearl handled one with a gun-blue sheen on the blade. (200, italics in original)

Ivan recognizes that masculinity is connected to intimidation and intimidation is directly connected to weaponry – his knife had to only *look* dangerous to meet his standards of what would be “good.” However, Thelwell allows us to see moments of vulnerability in their lives and peek behind the curtain of this power-driven man show:

Underneath their fierce rhetoric and warlike gestures their lives were not much different from his and they understood the demands of survival. Like him, many of these slick, streetwise urbanites were not long from the country either. . . . Some were by day garden “boys” at the mansions and would-be mansions in the foothills . . . (200 – 201)

These are still young men trying to find their way in the big city. Like Ivan they have come from the country as green mangoes most likely looking for starry-eyed success in a new land only to be ripened and hardened by the ruthlessness that can come from having too many people in a place with too few resources to serve them. As a result they adopt “fierce rhetoric and warlike gestures” as a way to recreate a semblance of the communal closeness that they most likely left behind in the country. However, in the city closeness between men is filtered through a mask:

But by night when the employers huddled behind iron gates and high walls, their garden boys in the little rooms out behind the servants’ quarters dressed in their night finery. They pocketed their *okapis*, answered only to their war names, and headed for the ranches

in search of companionship, adventure, and reputation. (201, italics in original)

His group of friends represents the shaping that Ramírez talks about in Puerto Rican masculinity. They demand respect and build reputation through their bodies and blades, dressing the part of a “real” man with night finery and okapis. But Ivan quickly learns that actions have to match this aura of reputation. As Ramírez says, “Masculinity is very demanding” (59). Therefore, in order to hold the position of “real” man and maintain any previously attained reputation, these young men have to literally put their bodies on the line:

On the ranch Ivan served his second apprenticeship in the streets, but not as an outsider this time. He learned about madmen and badmen, dead and living, men of great reputation and short careers. He boasted and dreamed of deeds he would do. Even as they cursed the rich, they cherished fantasies of “big money,” sudden wealth of their own. Everyone knew a boy, just like them, who had won sweepstakes, made a killing at the Chinese-run lotteries, “Drop Pan” or “Picka Peow,” or pulled off a “big job.” Or a face man who lucked into the bed and fortune of a wealthy old white woman and earned his money “doing night work” by the inches. Or else it was the giant samfie, the great hustle, which they knew came at least once in his life to every man – you only needed the wit to recognize it and the nerve and luck to hold

it. And failing any of those – well it was only something Bogart liked to say because it sounded good: “Live fast, die young, have a good-looking corpse.” (201 – 202)

These street lessons stress that the ultimate prize for wits and nerves is money, and the ultimate prize for having money is becoming fully male. Prime position among their crew is awarded to the one with the most money and legends circulate about the boys who have made it big, so much so that “everyone” knows of at least one boy like who got lucky. Ivan boasts and dreams of everything that he imagines he will do and they all fantasize about “big money.” These are generally the fantasies of those preoccupied with not having enough – enough defined as a wide range of resources. However, in these circles it is excusable not have enough as long as you are in hot reckless pursuit of wealth (and reputation) at all times.

Bogart’s line about living fast and dying young leaves a chilling feeling about just how far some of these young men would go to prove their toughness. His flippant remark about leaving a “good-looking corpse” feels like a mask in and of itself because he seems to be the only one willing to say it out loud. While it might produce a few laughs among friends, the reality of dying young is far too real for many young men facing lives in Jamaica (and other parts of the world). Recall that in chapter one Gary T. Barker documents how this politics of impersonation is really a public health issue because it is directly connected to the definitions of masculinity: “In much of the world,

young men die earlier than young women and die more often than older men largely because they are trying to live up to certain models of manhood – they are dying to prove that they are ‘real men’ (2). When held against these statistics, the impact of Bogart’s quip is much heavier. Barker’s research took place in communities such as Jamaica and he argues that most of the violence stems from these young men being in a position of what he calls “social exclusion:”

Social exclusion means, in addition to material want, facing curtailed life and vocational options. For most low-income young men, it means being keenly aware that one is being denied access to status, goods, respect and the company of young women that could belong to them if the world were a more just place. Modern democracies in a capitalistic world offer a series of explicit and implicit promises to their populaces. One of these is the promise that if you work hard enough you will have more or less equal access to goods and status; another is equal treatment and rights. Young men are keenly aware of the promises and experience distress and frustration when they come to see these promises as false. (28)

Basically, wealth and resources do not always materialize even in the face of that hot pursuit, whether in fact or fiction. Thelwell recognizes this as true and discusses how this frustration would contaminate community well-being. In the novel, Ivan and Bogart have been in the city for six years and are

noticing changes in their community. Now considered old-timers, they lament the violent streak that they see in the youth because it is very different than how they once were when they first arrived:

But yet it seemed to him that people were poorer, hard-pressed. Their nerves were bad, they were quick to anger and even violent in a way they had not been before. They had always been loud and contentious, demonstrative, but before it had been tempered and cooled by humor and forbearance. Now what humor there was was bitter and very angry ... and everybody was irritable ... (206, emphasis added)

We must remember that Ivan and Bogart came from a crew that believed primarily in the *threat* of violence – the dance of the okapi. But as time went on and people became “poorer” and more “hard-pressed” in Kingston, real violence was on the scene. Because the mid-1970s into the 1980s saw some of Jamaica’s deadliest politically-motivated violence in its history, Thelwell’s portrait of change could be considered historically accurate. Desperation generally stems from the tightening of those limited aforementioned resources and Jamaica certainly experienced (and continues to experience like any large city) limited resources in impoverished inner city communities. As the 2007 Gleaner article reflects on the film’s contemporary relevance, “the possibility of/ real, fundamental change for the poor-/ people of Jamaica . . . is still just a pretty illusion,/ not unlike the flickering images on a/ movie screen” (Nov. 25, 2007, p. F8) Kingston did in fact become more hard pressed

in reality so with the blending of fact and the novel's fiction, Thelwell sets the stage for violent masculinity to enter.

From Blades to Bullets

Parallel to the film, the novel maintains key scenes. Ivan records his hit song "The Harder They Come" and becomes involved with the ganja trade after realizing that his musical career will not support him. Under the mentorship of Jose and the Rastaman named Pedro, Ivan learns about the symbiotic relationship the traders have with the police and begins to lead a comfortable life with Elsa, Ras Pedro and his son Rupert. Thelwell also keeps Ivan's discovery of the plane intercepted in Miami loaded with Jamaican ganja. However, instead of its \$100,000 value in the film, Ivan is shocked over the "seven 'unred t'ousan' dollah" street value in the novel (330). This prompts him to challenge Jose with the same battery of questions about why the traders are not making more money and where the profits are really going. Jose still becomes frustrated enough to ask his police connection Detective Ray to teach Ivan a lesson by locking up for a little while and Ivan still shoots the police officer chasing him on his motorbike. Thelwell keeps all of the large details about Ivan turning into a fugitive gunman eluding police capture for several weeks and he still has Ivan gunned down by the story's end. The key difference lies in two scenes that Thelwell includes in the novel.

Both draw a thread between the importance of community and the cycle of violence albeit in very different ways.

Scene One

When Ivan is first brought into the fold of ganja trading, Ras Pedro is one who mentors him by explaining how the money that they give to Jose each week buys the traders the freedom to sell without police interference. When the police need assistance in finding more serious criminals, the traders are supposed to reciprocally provide any necessary information. On one of their pay days, Ras Pedro takes Ivan to The Lone Star café and lounge “where Jose made his weekly collections” (308). Ivan is introduced to other traders as they sit smoking and reasoning with each other and one of the men, Midnight Cowboy, asks Ivan if he is new to this kind of “work.” When Ivan answers “In a way” Midnight Cowboy asks him if he needs “some protection” and pulls out two thirty-eight caliber pistols displayed on a soft cloth for Ivan to inspect (309). Ivan is immediately fascinated with the pair:

What a way dem jus’ fit into me han’ dem, Ivan thought. Comfortably as though some distant gunsmith had measured them to his grip. They filled his hands, *seemed to complete them as though his hands had been empty, unfilled before they came into them.* (309, emphasis added)

Ivan's emptiness implies that a man's hands are not doing what they were made to do until he holds a gun in them. If a god-like "distant gunsmith" had measured them just for his grip, then there should be guns out there for every man's hands. Like the snug fit/connection between Eve and Adam's rib, guns complete the "real" man. When Ivan asks Ras Pedro his opinion, Pedro urges Ivan to leave them alone since "Wisdom is bettah dan weapons an' war . . . But one fool destroyet' a city" (310). Ivan defensively claims that he is not out to kill anyone (an ironic claim given the bloody end that we know is coming), but he cannot shake the new feeling he gets from the pistols themselves:

Ivan hefted the guns again, feeling the balance and marveling again at the natural, steady way they nestled into his grip. He held them together and turned his wrists over to see the play of light on the barrels. He twirled them backward western style by the trigger guards, pleased at the easy graceful way they settled back against the heel of his hand. (310)

Despite Midnight Cowboy's praises of how they really suit Ivan, Ras Pedro repeats his stern warning that "Dat a Babylon business, brute force an' destrucshan" and they leave (310). Nevertheless, Ivan silently wonders "How could he explain to Ras Pedro the fierce desire that he had felt when he saw them. The sense of finding something that he was meant to find" (310). Midnight Cowboy calls him a "Gunslingah" and "star-bwai" reminding us that this story charts Ivan's development into a cow-bwoy. Ivan is feeling the

pull of an image burnt into his brain by all of the Westerns that he has watched up to this point. Twirling the guns by their trigger guards is not in the film, but operates in the novel like the film scene when Ivan takes gunslinger poses in the photographer's studio.

While this gun solicitation and Pedro's firm rejection is in the film, the next film scene is Ivan's discovery of the detained and profitable ganja-laden Miami plane which prompts him to challenge Jose and later get chased by the officer that he shoots. In the novel, Thelwell follows this trail of events leading up to the police shooting which turns Ivan into a fugitive. However, Thelwell adds a crucial step beforehand. Ivan goes back home to the country to visit his family and friends.

There is a cultural understanding with Caribbean im/migrants that once you leave home you do not return until you have become successful. Success is generally measured in terms of money, but can also be granted through occupation and/or education. For Ivan, selling ganja has given him what he considers success:

Energy rose in him. He had money in his pocket and was riding a new bike. Behind him he had gifts, on his back fine clothes. He was a genuine recording artist even though he had forgotten the proof. He saw it clearly in his mind. . . . *Aiee*, but the district would talk about the homecoming for a long time. (312, italics in original)

But when Ivan gets back to his old community, he cannot even find the turn off the road because everything has changed so much. The fisherman's beach that he used to know as a boy is now the private property of "Sunset Cove Condominiums," Miss Ida's café and beach front is now treeless and populated by sunbathing white people in long chairs on an enclosed tiled floor. He finds out from Dudus, who is now married and going by the name "Butch," that she "sold the café to a white man and left" and that "Maas' Nattie died the same year he left" (316). When he goes to his grandmother's house, he finds it overgrown with vegetation: "There was no evidence of the passage of his generations, the ancestors whose intelligence, industry and skill had created a self-sufficient homestead there. None – at all" (320). He sits under a tree rethinking his decision to leave, feeling like he should have stayed to take care of the land, realizing the significance of a sense of home:

The worst insult that people had was the sneering "Cho, you no come from nowhe'." For the first time he was feeling what that really meant.

Now he realized just how important this sense of place was to his most fundamental sense of himself (321).

Determined never to come back again, he goes to Maas' Nattie's property for one last time and is shocked to see white people in the house. Although peering down through the bushes up on the hill, Ivan makes out a nude blond woman and two raggedy dreadlocked men with full beards and jean shorts, all smoking ganja and lounging around the yard. As Ivan leaves in

disgust, he sees the sign by the gate proclaiming that Maas' Nattie's house is now "Woodstock, South" (323). Driving back to the city on his motorbike, Ivan tries to make sense of just how much his country home had changed:

He felt *rootless and adrift in a world without rules or boundaries*.

"Ivanhoe Martin, you no come from nowhe'," he told himself bitterly, and knew the pain of losing *something important, but unexamined and taken totally for granted*, so that the first awareness of its importance came only with its loss. . . .

Instead of the joyous and triumphant homecoming of the mind, he had learned, abruptly and with no preparation, that he had no home to come to. (323, emphasis added)

Ivan clearly understands the importance of a community because he and his friends recreate it with each other on their ranch in the city. However, this deeper sense of rooted community is possibly more important to one's identity because it lays a moral foundation upon which all else rests. Yet as Thelwell adds, this grounding, this community is often "taken totally for granted" despite its being a cornerstone of personal resolve:

The same certainty was a part of the psyche of all the city's dispossessed. One heard it often. . . . But, serious or not, illusion or not, empty phrase or not, there was a reason why it came so often to the lips.

“Bwai, me no have fe take dis shit, y’know – me can jus’ go back a me bush.”

“Not because you see me so, y’know – me come from somewhere, y’know.”

“No bother t’ink say me have fe stay yah, y’know – fe me people land deh a country, await.” (325)

Thelwell points to the renewing sense of place and home in times of tribulation. Without these essential roots, lamenting a “past [that] had deserted him” (326) Ivan is cut loose in a world that no longer has “rules or boundaries” to him. Now without rules or boundaries, Ivan goes back to Midnight Cowboy and buys the two guns he previously saw:

Ivan went into the canefields and acquainted himself with them. He practiced until his ammunition and his excitement were spent. When he came out he was exhausted but felt as though *something had been replaced. Not restored, for what was gone could not be restored, but there was something in its place.* (326, emphasis added)

Ivan’s rootless, homeless feeling has been replaced by the ruthlessness of guns. Most notably, it could not have happened if his ancestral connections still existed. Maas’ Nattie died the year he left, a symbolic end to the form of masculinity that his father figure represented. And his familiar homeland had all changed – taken over by tourism and therefore dead to him as well –

especially since it has also been sold out to foreigners. Rhygin the fugitive is reborn in these ashes of memory and echoes of “false history” (326). But as we learn in the scene from Django, a big gun helps a man to essentially become male and thereby actualize his true identity, a mythic man, a “real” man:

“Wait, unu must be doan know? Dis Rhygin carry thunder inna him hand dem. Rhygin carry lightning inna him fist. Me say Rhygin alias, Rhygin badder dan cancer, worse dan a heart attack. Rhygin stormy. Him hot hot. Oyo, Oyo, Oyo, me say Rhygin stormy....Rhygin who no know him faddah...” (327, italics in original)

Ivan becomes Rhygin becomes legend. Community in this instance acts as recorder for this new root/ruthless Ivan who becomes larger than life. Therefore, it is with this disconnected mentality that he is able to shoot the first officer and become the violent cow-bwoy that we know from the film. By placing this homecoming scene right before Ivan buys the guns, Thelwell points to the importance of community as a possible solution or alternative to violence since we see the storminess he turns into when he gets back.

Scene Two

When Ivan is gunned down at the end of the novel, Thelwell highlights the importance of community in a different way. He picks up on

how community also plays a role in keeping memories alive through oral traditions such as ring games, chants and stories. In the novel, Elsa is still the person who tips off the police as to where Ivan is hiding. After Ivan is shot on the island where he was waiting to catch a boat to Cuba, the novel continues where the movie abruptly ends. In the novel, Pedro limps home to meet Elsa after the police beat him and shave his dreadlocks for information. While they sit, the scene switches to the officers who shot Ivan coming close to look at his dead body: “‘Dat? Dat a de great Rhygin?’ The corporal’s boyish voice seemed disappointed. ‘Cho, is jus’ another likel dutty criminal’” (391). Then the scene switches back to Pedro sitting under a mango tree overhearing Ivan’s banned song play on a neighboring radio. The deejay Numero Uno interrupts to announce Ivan’s death and then the scene cuts to the song playing in a Trench Town gulley where several boys are playing:

“Bram, Bram, Bram!” He leapt from cover, guns blazing.

The posse returned fire. “You dead!” the sheriff shouted. “Cho man, you dead!”

“Me Ah Rhygin!” the boy shouted back. “Me can’ dead!”

He again swept the posse with withering fire before dancing back under cover. His clear piping voice sang out tauntingly, “Rhygin was here but ‘im jus’ disappear...” (391 – 392)

These last lines are from a children's chant printed in the chapter Thelwell entitles "Manhunt." This chapter describes the comparable scenes from the film when the newspaper prints Ivan's claims to have made "crime history" and his signature "I was here" signs are painted all over the city. The chapter opens with the chant:

Rhygin was here

But 'im jus' disappear

Wid two pint a beer

An' a half-penny pear... (354, italics in original)

Like the real-life escapades of Ivanhoe Martin, the public is fascinated by "the quite inexplicable failure of the police and military to come up with one poor, powerless, semiliterate rude-bwai" (355). In communities with strong oral traditions, legendary news makes its way into song and rhyme and this chant more than likely reflects real chants sung by children growing up in Jamaica in the 1940s. As the boy announces, the legend of Rhygin "can' dead" – even beyond his last reel. The chants and games will ensure that his memory lives on. What is more striking, however, is that boys' game of cops and robbers signals a deadly form of imitation.

While this is just a game of make-believe now, this idea carries over into adulthood and propels young men to take the risks that Gary T. Barker outlines – they are literally "dying to be men." The formulaic rituals

reproduced in Westerns paint the hero as the ultimate man who is fully in control of his body, his environment and the people in it. Recycling these models of invincibility truly sets young boys up to follow Bogart's fatalistic attitude of living fast, dying young and possibly having a good-looking corpse. The idea that death can somehow be stylized stretches the notion that masculinity is a huge show into grotesque proportions. If cowboy masculinity is obsessed with the way "real" men look, this outlook means that the performance of a "real" man never ends; it literally follows him into his grave. Therefore, Thelwell's inclusion of this children's chant reminds us that Ivanhoe "Rhygin(g)" Martin is indeed a real person in Jamaica's history who will never be forgotten. At the same time, this game imparts a cautionary tale to take care of our little ones and ground them in that sense of community that the fictional Ivan grew up with and lost. If they (young boys especially) only see one kind of violent solution to the poverty that they experience, it will have devastating community consequences.

The complexities of these consequences are sometimes easier to sort out in a fictional world and several Jamaican authors have tried to do just that. [Note: Perry Henzell, who produced and directed the film *The Harder They Come*, published a novel in 1982 entitled *Power Game* that fictionalizes many of the island's real-life struggles with violence during the 1970s.] One fictional strategy for examining the effects of violence on boy's lives is to create a coming-of-age story. Garfield Ellis's 2005 novel *For Nothing At All* does just

that. If Michael Thelwell ends his novel with the image of children (specifically boys) and how they are shaped by violence, then it makes sense to pick up this image where Thelwell leaves off. In this way, Ellis takes Thelwell's thematic baton and carries it into the 21st century. Therefore, let us turn to close examination of Ellis's novel to explore other representations of violent masculinity and how they play out in this coming-of-age story.

For Nothing At All

Garfield Ellis tells the coming-of-age story of four boys, Colin, Stevie, Wesley and Skin, growing up in the same neighborhood in the midst of the political violence that clamped down on many low-income communities in Jamaica during the late 1970s into the 1980s. Narrated by Wesley, the novel reveals how each boy is somehow affected by the violence around him and how their relationships with each other, (and other people in their community), change as a result. The novel opens with Colin, Stevie, Wesley and Skin on their way to White Marl All Age School one morning. Skin's father has cows that Skin helps to tend on his way to and from school. After pasturing the cows one morning, Skin convinces the rest of them that a quick morning swim would preclude the need for baths that night. They stay too long and wind up being late for school. Late-comers to White Marl School have two options: "walk up and take a caning [from Mrs. Campbell] or turn back and try to outrun the big boys, . . . that she would send tearing down the

hill like attack dogs to catch and bring us back" (1). One of the big boys, Red Head, is famous among the younger ones for notoriously catching anything he runs after.

As they approach the steep hill to the school's entrance, Wesley reminds them of the cautionary tale that circulates among school members: "'If you see Red Head, don't run. Him fast like jet'" (2). Therefore, when they are predictably chased by Red Head and another older boy, Wesley and his friends scatter. The notorious Red Head ferociously runs after Wesley, but through the twists and turns of neighboring yards, heavy traffic and a crowded bus Wesley escapes back to school where he steps into "the legend . . . as the only person to have ever 'dusted' the great Red Head" (5). By including this event at the very beginning of the novel, we as readers are primed to see Wesley as something special, somehow legendarily different from his friends. We are also primed to see these childhood memories as different from the rest of the novel because they are told as flashback and in a font that is different from the other sections. In the Macmillan Caribbean Writers Series edition, the childhood font is larger and without the curls on letters that an adult text's typeface might have. It resembles the print in a reading primer with seemingly more white space on the page. This gives the whole narrative a feeling of innocence and simplicity like the uncomplicated stories in a nursery rhyme. However, this simplicity stands in sharp distinction to the stories from their teenage lives.

While the five childhood chapters are marked with roman numerals, the five young adult chapters have abstract phrases that act as teasers such as “How Skin got his stripes” and “Colin’s Time.” The first young adult chapter, “The night Stevie died,” readies us for violence of some kind and jumps right into how Wesley witnesses a gunfight on his way home from school that day. Skin is at Wesley’s house waiting for him to be ready for their neighborhood watch duties and jealously presses Wesley for the gunfight details that he missed seeing himself. As Wesley drags out the details to heighten Skin’s anticipation, Wesley says ““It was just like TV. Just like a cowboy show’” (6) and then later repeats, ““You shoulda out there, man. Cowboy show, me tell you...like cowboy show’” (7). Like the boys at the end of Thelwell’s novel, there is an element of heroic make-believe to the story. Although real, the violence here is like a movie distanced from their lives as though happening only on a screen. In the safety of retelling, they relish over the details and Skin presses Wesley for more specifics:

“What kind a gun them did have?”

“You mean the big gun? Me no know.”

“No man! What kinda gun them did have inna the shoot-out part?”

“I don’ know, Skin!”

“How you so idiot, man?” He looked at me and shook his head.

“How you so fool fool? You can inna the middle of a shoot-out and

don' know what kinda gun the man them did have. Bet you, if it was me, I would a tell you what kind o' gun every single gunman out there have. You don' have no information inna you story." (10)

The only information that matters to Skin is the types of guns that are used. This is how he measures what "real" men look like and he is focused only on the weapons in the hands of the gunmen. There is also no real concern over casualties, despite the shooting taking place in the middle of several onlookers. Challenging Skin's accusation of him being so "fool fool" as to not know key details, Wesley questions Skin as to whether or not *he* has ever seen a real shoot-out, and Skin counters with,

"Rahtid, look how much time me see shoot-out. Me never out there the Sunday evening when them shoot Hog inna the Pentecostal church?"

"You too lie!" I challenged. "You wasn't out there. Plus them never shoot him inna the church. Is down the road them shoot him and him stagger into the churchyard and dead. You too lie!"

"How you mean, I was out there!"

"You never see it. Plus that wasn't shoot-out, that was a killing...that was assassination." (11)

Arguing about the grisly details of whether or not Hog was shot in the church or in the churchyard, whether it was a shoot-out or assassination, gives us the

impression that killing frames these young adults' lives with some regularity. More importantly, the constancy of violence around them anesthetizes them to the seriousness of it all and cements their beliefs about how violence shapes male identity. Still innocent onlookers, gun violence is still an abstract thrill for them and the one true way that they believe men prove their masculinity. They are tacitly invested in a particular way of being male, along with a specific way of *looking* like "real" men. This is not just the *threat* of violence that Ivan and his crew evoke through the flashing blades of their okapi dance. This is the unleashing of real bullets at a challenger in the name of some unspoken rule: "Cho," Skin said, "a man mus' face a man. Is so you know who *badder*" (12, italics in original).

With that attitude, it is not surprising that these minor skirmishes take place against a larger backdrop of community violence. Skin stops by Wesley's house to pick him up for their neighborhood watch duties, but this is more than a regular safety patrol. The two political parties in Jamaica, the PNP (People's National Party) and the JLP (Jamaican Labour Party), battle for community support by using goods and services, such as housing and employment, to secure support for their side. Whole neighborhoods become rigidly associated with being either PNP or JLP territory. When one party is in power, resources are hoarded for their supporters while members of the opposing party find daily life a difficult struggle against nepotism. However, when power shifts, that struggle is forgotten and replaced with similar

avarice. Wesley and Skin's community lies in between PNP and JLP neighborhoods and their watch was created to help stem the violence enacted over and through their homes:

We had no gunmen, and we tried to have friends from all sides. So many times the gunmen from both sides would trample through the scheme to fight or scout around the edges, molest us and threaten us. At times they would break into our houses or fire gunshots at the homes they felt supported the party they hated.

So we formed our own patrol and established a six to six curfew.

Now to venture through our scheme after six o'clock would be to take one's life into one's own hands. Every family was involved, and every yard must volunteer someone at least one night per month. Some were too afraid to go, some refused on the grounds that they were not policemen. Some like Mr [sic] Hozzy took it seriously as his civic duty. Others like Mas' Lloyd came because he had nothing else to do, and us boys went for the adventure and fun of it. (15)

Like the retelling of a shoot-out, the neighborhood patrol is an abstract thrill for the boys. It hinges on genuine violence but still distant enough that they go for the "adventure" and "fun" of it all. However, when one of Wesley's school friends takes Wesley's invitation to swap books with him that evening, half of their seven-man patrol catches him and wants to kill him instantly. When Wesley's half of the patrol arrives on the mob scene, he recognizes the

cowering bloody figure as Henry and asks Henry why he is coming through the neighborhood after six. Henry responds that it was not six yet, but Wesley reminds him that it is daylight savings time and nearly seven. As the group lets him go and Colin tells him to run, Henry takes off with a now empty book bag and is hit in the back of the head by a stone. Henry keeps running across the border and Wesley starts thinking that being on patrol has drastic consequences:

After that, the evening became a strange place to me and the idea of being on watch filled me with a certain anxiety. Suddenly it wasn't so exciting to be there any more. I began to fear the sharpened cutlass in my hand and the real circumstances that an actual confrontation could bring. . . .

How could someone die for forgetting it was daylight saving time?
How could someone have to die for forgetting what time of the day it is? (20)

Violence is snatched out of the abstract and into sharp focus when someone close to Wesley is victimized. Suddenly the "adventure" and "fun" is replaced with "anxiety" and recognition of death's bitter possibility. He also questions how arbitrary their patrol rules really are when they form the basis that almost sanctions Henry's demise. This is a turning point for Wesley that causes him to reflect on how the violence around him affects both he and his friends. However, it is a paradoxical awareness in which, on the one hand,

events such as Henry's simple confusion over time help Wesley to recognize the futility of violence. But on the other hand, Wesley is still excited by the thrill and action that guns seem to bring, for example when he watches the shoot-out in his neighborhood. Like his neighborhood's neutral boundaries between the two warring political sides, Wesley's life straddles the two sides of Jamaican boyhood. He is both turned off by and stereotypically turned on by guns and violence. However, Wesley's friend Skin plays a more stereotypical boyhood role in his fascination with toughness and violence. As Skin's interest in Wesley's retelling of the shoot-out that he missed attests,

Skin also loved guns. He loved to talk about them but we figured he had never held one so we never took him seriously. But he spoke with such authority, had so much information, that if one did not know him as we did, one would think he had a small arsenal tucked in his room at home. One would believe that he lived on a large ranch with its own gun room and that half his days were spent hunting wild boars and chasing badmen and cowboys across the range. Or that at nights he sneaked away to fight with the badmen on either side of the political divide, depending on what mood he was in. (45)

With this kind of fascination, it makes sense that Skin would be the first one of Wesley's friends to bring a gun into their group. During Wesley's last year of high school, Skin comes by his house one evening to show Wesley the gun

he borrowed from Patrick, a neighborhood gunman. They take it to the river to practice firing it and Skin invites Wesley to hold it.

But I was not afraid of it. I was afraid of me. I was afraid of the beating of my heart, the heaving of my chest and my breathing trapped in my throat. Like the first time I felt I would kiss a woman. The excitement of something new that would change my life for ever. Something not just new but that I had been secretly longing for.

It scared me that I wanted to hold it so badly. (46)

This phallocentric experience epitomizes how guns are wrapped up with coming-of-age for boys and blended with male sexuality. It is significant that this is Wesley's last year in high school, an age where many boys are having their first sexual experiences. In this regard, holding this phallic gun takes on the awkward excitement of a "first time." His heart pounds, his breathing is shortened and he is excited at the turning point that this moment represents in his maturity. Like losing one's virginity, holding and firing this gun is something that, he says, "would change my life for ever." And like that first sexual experience for many boys, it is something that he wants to do "so badly." This yearning is reminiscent of the moment in the novel *The Harder They Come*, when Ivan wraps his hands around the pair of guns. They feel complete when he finally holds them: "as though his hands had been empty" before holding them. Skin is especially transformed by the presence of this

gun. Like Ivan in the film posing for gunslinger pictures, Skin does some posing of his own:

The gun empty, Skin did not put it into his bag but stuffed it behind him into the waist of his pants. He then ducked, fell to the ground and retrieved it in a flash like a cowboy in a gunfight. Then he rolled on the grass away from me, pointing the gun around, "Bam, bam, badam!" (48)

Yet although it is not his gun, Skin begins to act like a "badman" – in effect performing the role of a "real" man that he holds in high esteem. As their other friend Colin explains to Wesley two weeks later, "'Ever since Skin get that gun him start boasting and showing it off to everyone. He even took it to school to show his friends'" (49). After Skin lends the gun to an acquaintance, Danny Bruk Foot, and can't get it back, Colin comes to tell Wesley to try and persuade Skin not to do anything stupid. However, Skin takes Shaper, who is the neighborhood blow-hard who has a pop-gun, to try and intimidate Danny into returning the gun. Danny lives in another housing scheme and when the pop-gun accidentally goes off, Danny spreads the rumor in his scheme that Skin tried to shoot him. When Wesley and Colin finally catch up to Skin at his house later that evening, they all silently know that this allegation meant Skin's imminent death:

There was a sense that things would not be the same again in our scheme. The war had finally touched us. Now we were not just a

thorough-fare or a place where gunmen from either side would meet and fight. Now we were part of it. We had our own badman now and they from down the lane had licence to terrorise us more. They could now target his friends and schoolmates and those whom they felt were his family. Even if he were dead, they would not be deterred. And if he was alive, if he had escaped somehow, they would come and come again. They would shoot and they would kill until they found him. (54 - 55)

And they did. Skin's house is shot up around midnight and although Skin gets away with wounds in his foot and side, he later dies where he ran to hide at Wesley's house. What is most disturbing is the cyclical nature of all the violence. The need for vengeance does not end and is seemingly justifiable in the minds of the young men who go through any lengths to exact it. This idea of justice and vengeance is a key component of violent masculinity images that young men are socialized to believe. Remember the stories from the shelling match in Thelwell's *The Harder They Come*. Ivan sides with Officer Roy who shoots his colleagues on Christmas day and the brother who kills the bull in order to marry the princess. This violence might seem excessive to an outsider, but makes perfect sense to the perpetrator as well as to those who buy into this model of problem solving. It is clear that Danny Bruk Foot and his neighbors believe in it. And in a sense, Skin does as well because he goes to Danny's house to play the role of violent avenger. However, like the

okapi dance of Ivan and his crew, Skin is *performing* and wants Danny to respond to the mere *threat* of possible violence. But they live in a different world.

The very fact that their neighborhood has to set a curfew and form a nightly patrol reminds us that these are minor battles that take place on the stage of a larger war with broader acts of brutality in Jamaica. They are coming-of-age when violence is an everyday occurrence for many of its low-income residents. This violence warps friendships and socializes boys to become hardened men. Wesley experiences this transformation first-hand when a wounded Skin convinces him to tell Patrick the lie that someone else stole the gun and shot Skin in the process. When Wesley ventures into enemy territory at two in the morning to find Patrick to relay Skin's message, Wesley is met by Patrick's neighborhood group who thinks Wesley is trying to trick them:

This was not the same Patrick. This was not the same time. They were all strangers to me and I was a stranger to them...not a friend. And in a war, I could only be one other thing. (62)

Standing around him with guns in the yard of another friend's house, Patrick and his group whisper about Wesley's fate. It is only then that Wesley fully realizes how things had truly changed between he and his friends, how much violence had turned them into different people:

Those memories of those times of made-up stories and mischief, of wandering the bushes in search of cows, days of chevy chase, hopscotch and marbles, did not match the place where we now were, nor the feelings that assailed me. For this was another time. Life had changed to war and friends had grown to men.

And I did not know how things could have changed so quickly or what could have remade us in such a short time...nor why and how it could have been so easy for them to kill me...how it could have been so easy to die, for nothing...For Nothing At All. (63 – 64)

Ellis harkens back to those innocent childhood memories that he outlines in the large font sections. However, the remaking he questions is the process of socialization that cuts the world into sharp boundaries of for or against, friend or foe. Although he is an old friend, the prism of violence allow them only to see him as a foe. They eventually let him go, but only at the intervention of Mr. Johnson, a local fisherman who Wesley realizes in that moment was “more than just a fisherman” (62). After Wesley begins to cry and repeatedly resist their suggestion that he move along (knowing in his mind that they had decided to kill him once he started walking home), Mr. Johnson opens the door of the house in front of which they are standing and tells them to leave Wesley alone:

“Onoo leave him alone! he bellowed. And then he looked at me.

“But don’t come back up here. Stay down there in you scheme. Don’t

come back up here.” And then he motioned to Andrew. “Follow him halfway, Andrew.” Then he pulled inside and slammed the door. (63)

Mr. Johnson can clear the danger because he is *their* community’s top man. These younger boys most likely aspire to be a neighborhood controller like him one day – a “real” man. Yet in the process of their maturity, they learn that boundaries become a key part of identity formation – both personal as well as national. We see a similar relationship to boundaries in the novel *The Harder They Come*. Considering Ivan’s feeling of rootlessness in a world “without rules or boundaries” after he discovers (in the novel) that his childhood community has changed forever and there is no evidence of his ancestral connection to that country space, that (home)land. It is important for Ivan to stake a claim to the specificity of territory and land in order to feel like he mattered in the world. Without that connection Ivan is able to buy guns and solve his problems through violence. The specificity of territory and land is taken to jingoistic extremes in the real-life political violence that chokes Jamaica during the 1970s and 1980s, and in Ellis’s novel. Throughout the story, it is evident that masculinity is intertwined with protecting their territory, their city space, their (home)land. Wesley is told to stay “down there” and not “come back up here.” The divide between territories is sharply drawn and he must know and respect these divisions. Not doing so is essentially asking for a Western-style showdown. This territorial definition of masculinity is consistent with the definition of masculinity in the film *The*

Harder They Come considering the hot-headed, impulsive and violent definition that “cowboy” also has. Even after Skin dies and electoral violence ebbs, Wesley finds himself in the midst of the same narrow definitions of cow-*bwoy* masculinity: “. . . though there was some sort of lull as the violence caught its breath after the long election campaign, the feelings through the village never died and tension and hatred last for ever” (123). This cyclical need for revenge is the tradition at the heart of most Westerns and the basis of socialization for many Jamaican boys coming-of-age during this period of political violence. Additionally, Westerns are all about “the importance of land and boundaries . . . as well as stories of personal and national identity formed within a relationship with nature” (Carmichael 4). As mentioned earlier, masculinity is tied to protecting territory, space and (home)land and Wesley finds himself literally tied to constructing new space and hopefully a neutral territory between the two sides.

Several months after high school graduation, eighteen-year old Wesley wants no part of the political warfare and refuses to take a job if it is at all connected with any politician. However, he has no luck getting any other jobs and sits around his house, much to his mother’s dismay. His mother insists that their Minister of Parliament (MP) is not a politician but instead has a duty to his constituency to find them work and encourages Wesley to get a letter from him. When he sees his old friends-turned-gunmen, Andrew and Patrick, (members of the gang that wanted to kill him that night when Skin

died), at the MP's office, Wesley throws the first MP's letter into the trash. His mother takes him back to the MP months later to get a second letter and escorts him to a construction site where she makes the foreman stop and pay attention to their special delivery:

"I can go back to Mr [sic] Clarke [the MP] and I can tell him what you said, but my son not lining up with no gunman on no side. He went to high school and has his passes. And Mr [sic] Clarke said I should bring this letter to you. You are not the only one who fight to make this party!" (117 - 118)

So with her insistence and his stellar grades, Wesley is hired as an assistant timekeeper at the construction site for the new Central Village High School going up between the two rival neighborhoods. This puts him "in the centre of the very thing I had spent all my short life trying to avoid" (120) - politics. Straddling the two warring housing schemes, the school (like Wesley) is supposed to represent unity, but turns into anything but that.

Wesley's role is to take the names of the tradesmen that line up for work in two separate party lines each day (JLP and PNP) and assign jobs to an equal number of them from each side. Although he initially detests the thought of being so close to political divisions, he later feels that this would be "an opportunity to provide jobs. To unite the village again" (122). Because he grew up one side of the political divide and went to school on the other, Wesley knows people on both sides of the boundaries (the reason why he is

able to find his way at two in the morning when a bleeding Skin sends him running). For this reason Wesley is seen as, and begins to feel like, the perfect person for the job.

However, when Mr. Johnson (fisherman and neighborhood controller) visits him at his house on the evening of his second day, Wesley is reminded of the latent resentment that runs through these communities. Mr. Johnson is coming to ask Wesley to make sure that members from his scheme get chosen for the work slots, but as he sits there talking, all Wesley can think about is the night of Skin's death:

There were things I wanted to tell him but I found I could not do so. Words I wanted to say seemed to stick in my mouth while other words flowed around them. I wanted to understand how he could be so bold, how they held my life like nothing one night and threw it among them like a ball in a dandy shandy game. But I could not even resolve it in my own mind. For somewhere deep inside I had told myself I was stupid to have run like a fool into the middle of a war zone. But yet, another part of me was hating all of them for fighting the war in the first place. And the absence of my friends, and what we have become was like a lump in the bottom of my stomach, *it was pain that needed venting*, but I did not know who exactly to vent it on, and what shape the anger should take when it is spewed, nor how it would make me look. So I just sat there as the silence came suddenly to me

and watched him through eyes that were slowly misting over. (125 – 126, emphasis added)

Wesley's reflections speak to the learned invulnerability that so many boys undergo as part of their maturation process. As Wesley says, "it was pain that needed venting, but *I did not know . . . how it would make me look.*" The preoccupation with how "real" men *look* is of particular concern and Wesley knows that "real" men in his community supposedly do not express the pain they feel inside. Becoming a "real" man requires a silence that is coded as stoic and brave, a supposedly necessary protecting of one's internal boundaries (to match the external battle over boundaries) and this shrouding echoes the learned toughness that Ivan experiences in the novel when he tries to mimic Jose's aloof behavior. In the violent blood-letting that accompanies this period in Jamaica's history, personal and national identity are intertwined as many young men search to make names for themselves through violence on behalf of political affiliation or simply for individual fame. According to Mr. Johnson, these aches and pains are a necessary part of maturation:

" . . . We in a time of turbulence, this country. Is like we as people moving from the sea to the dry land. And you have to get to the point where the water meet the beach. An' you know that sometimes that is the roughest part. You want to get to the beach but current strong and the water rough...turbulence. You see it. Turbulence...high winds and

big waves. So that is where we are now as a people, is there so – at a point of turbulence. Where everything mix up...in a turbulence you will see the best of us and the worst of us, just like how you will see highest waves and the lowest troughs. And *not everybody going survive. That natural*. Is there so Jamaica is, is there so Central Village is right now. And is either we cross to the good, dry land or we drown in the sea. But we cannot escape this time. This turbulence. This war. It is where we is. Is so we going turn a real country. . . .”

He seemed so silly to me, sitting there on the stone wearing a sweat suit as if it was a three-piece suit from Spencers’, with his gold chain hanging down onto his undershirt like a badman out of the movie, *The Harder They Come*, reciting words bigger than himself; the whole thing seemed comical to me. (128 – 129, emphasis added)

Mr. Johnson’s analogy works not only for the nation, but also for the individual man-child invested in the cow-bwoy model of masculinity that we have come to know through Ivan. More importantly, if we take this model of “turbulence” and apply it to personal identities, we definitely know “not everybody going survive” (129). However, Wesley’s experience of personal and national identity is different. He resists the violence in his personal life and tries to stay out of national politics, ultimately seeing Mr. Johnson’s badman identity (which he ironically connects to the film *The Harder They Come*) as comical. Wesley rejects this badman identity. However, his struggle

to do the right thing symbolizes the difficulty that some young men have in resisting the hegemonic forms of “real” masculinity surrounding them, particularly if the entire community seems invested in that hegemony. Gary T. Barker finds this same sense of disillusionment while doing research on young men and masculinity in Jamaica:

The failures of the ‘system’ – both economic and political – have left many Caribbean young men with little hope for the future and little belief in the ability of a given youth programme, organization or initiative to make a difference in their lives. . . . They are keenly aware of political corruption and the lack of educational and employment opportunities in the region. They also perceive that *those who made a living illicitly, drug traffickers and producers, go unpunished (and that some political leaders in the region collude with them)*. (42, emphasis added)

The young men understand their own life circumstances and recognize how government plays a role in the maintenance of inequality; they see the trap but cannot break the trap. This is the paradox that Ellis creates for Wesley in the novel. Nevertheless, Wesley persists in his attempts to create an identity not grounded in fraud or violence. He displays a self-awareness that Barker describes as “metacognitive skills” in a young man from a low-income community in Brazil (34). In other words, Barker says, he is “able to think about how he thought – when weighing life options” (34). Yet even with this introspection, positive identity formation is still an everyday struggle,

particularly when all the young men around Wesley seem to find immediate success with the “live fast, die young” archetype:

But when I dreamed, sometimes the only thing that I felt made me different from Spragga and Patrick and those who fired guns and lived at the race track, was the fact that I believed that if I stayed out of trouble, one day I would make it. One day, I would be among important people shaking hands, drinking wine, paying homage, being paid homage to. And those who ignored school would have seen me out there as an example of what they could have been had they followed the rules, behaved themselves and obeyed the law.

But now *they* were the ones being feted. They were the ones who were having their way, driving the fancy cars and getting the contracts, whose shoes were worth six months of my wages. And I guess, just standing there among the labourers with the dirty book in my hand, in my old shoes and dirty, khaki clothes, I felt angry and disappointed. As if, by virtue of what was happening in front of me, my life and sacrifices till then had been for nothing. (154 – 155, italics in original)

Ellis uses Wesley to create a powerful testimony about the anger and frustration that many young men experience when trying to meet the various obligations, (particularly financial), that becoming a “real” man demands in the face of social exclusion:

. . . social exclusion psychologically wounds young men in gender-specific ways. The chief mandate of manhood is to earn income, to work, to become financially dependent and to support others, if possible. This income is a prerequisite for attracting young women and being able to form a stable relationship or start a family. To be an out-of-work young man is *not* to be a man, it is to be a boy, to lack status. . . . For many young men, to be socially excluded *and* to be denied the title of manhood is injustice squared. (57 – 58, italics in original)

These findings clearly match Wesley's experience. He is trying to follow the rules, but the world around him does not seem to affirm that path. Ellis recognizes the contradictions that Barker summarizes and layers more and more incidents of corruption in the novel for Wesley to face. For example, Danny Bruk Foot and Patrick want him to add extra names to the job list from each of their respective sides, he finds out that Patrick really works for the same MP that gave him his letter and Patrick seems able to control how many names from each side can be on the work list. Then he has to sign timesheets that add badmen to their payroll even though they did not do any work. When Wesley goes to confront his foreman about the creation of these phony "dead-man cheques," the foreman gives him three envelopes to buy his silence, calling them "the ties that *blind*" (138, italics in original). Wesley reluctantly takes them and tries to figure out how to confront the dishonesty:

My conscience bothered me all through Friday night. But Saturday morning I woke up with five times my salary in my pocket. As soon as I bought the first shirt in Spanish Town, I would not have recognised the word conscience if someone had marked it in my palm in broad strokes. (138)

The social pressures to live up to the image that pair masculinity with financial stability cannot compete with his mental pressures to be honest. Therefore, Wesley becomes adept at the juggling game: "Not only had I built a reputation for fairness but I felt I had also grasped how to deal with the gunmen. Just give them a couple dead-man cheque. It was the solution to all things" (138). However, when Wesley confronts Danny's accusation of being a big shot with the response that Danny was the real big shot, Danny gives him a warning that rests upon more than just a threat of violence:

"Me a big shot?" I answered. "You are the big shot. All you do is just send you name and put on the list and then you get money. That is big shot."

"Mind how you talk to me, bwai, Wesley. Mind how you talk. You done know what happen to Skin already."

I did not answer for I did not know how. (139)

Wesley does not know how to respond because he finds alternative solutions to his problems. He is nevertheless caught in an awkward situation:

“How lane man no have no representative. How only hill man have liaison officer [Patrick].” . . . “Only hill man have liaison officer. Plus them have you.” He shoved his finger violently at me. “You think me don’ know which side you deh ‘pon, bwai.”

“I don’t have any side,” I said.

“Everybody have side, bwai. We wan’ liaison officer too.”

“Well, I am not the one to talk to.”

“Well, you go tell them. Or one day we just come over there and kill off all o’ onoo.”

He must have practised that stare for years to perfect it so – the screwing up of his face, the setting of his jaw, the pointing of his finger, angled from above his head like a dart, to stop inches from my eyes. But the dead flat of his eyes and the coldness in them was something that only experience of having power over life and death could produce. In his eyes, you could see that he had killed before and that he believed he had the power to do it at his will. (140)

The confrontation with Danny highlights three things. First, it underlines how significant issues of territory and boundaries really are – lining up on

two sides, JLP and PNP, “hill” versus “lane.” There are constant divisions tied to identity. Second, it reasserts how much masculinity is tied to money and work because Danny is essentially arguing for more of his community’s men to be included on the lists in order for them to ultimately get paid (whether justly or not). And finally, it points to how much of a performance masculinity really is. We can just imagine Danny practicing Ivan’s gunslinger poses from the film many times before he actually threatens anyone or pulls any trigger – remember how Skin rolled on the gun and drew his gun that night by the river with Wesley. However, Skin’s death, which Danny invokes, reminds Wesley and the reader that we are no longer dealing with a futile okapi-like threat of violence.

Wesley is understandably afraid and even more frustrated. When his foreman tries to find out what the confrontation was about, he cautions Wesley:

“I ask you, Schoolboy,” he said, “because you will have to work close with them same bad boys there and I don’t want them kill you. I know you think you know them but they will kill you. And you have to get along with them.” (142)

Wesley responds by asking the foreman to simply keep them all off the site by giving them the infamous “dead-man cheques,” but Scotty (the foreman) anxiously quiets him by saying that they cannot officially promise anyone those:

“No, man, you mad! Next thing a hundred o’ them line up out there.
You mad! Where you ever hear that ‘bout this dead-man cheque?
There is nothing called that. And if you mention that in a crowd I
would have to fire you on the spot. Is prison work!” (142)

Although Scotty is the one who shows Wesley the “ties that blind,” he only now adds the layer of silence and secrecy that go along with the dishonesty – “Masculinity is very demanding” (Ramirez 59). It is logical, therefore, that Wesley learns about another level of deceitfulness immediately after this lesson. When Scotty tells Wesley that he has to wait after work to verify a sand delivery, Wesley resigns himself to the idea that Patrick is involved:

Nothing surprised me any more at that site. First I thought Patrick would be working for me, then I learnt he was the political arm and liaison officer. Just as I was getting used to that, I was hearing that he was now the contractor to bring the sand. (143)

But the corruption that Wesley encounters in his new job is overwhelming. Each day brings a new twist and he is growing weary under the layers of silence and collusion. Now stuck with Patrick to verify a sand delivery, Wesley sees the dishonesty from a different angle:

I ran over to Patrick. “What they doing? They can’t do that. You can’t do that.”

“Who to stop me?”

“But that can’t right,” I shouted. “They destroying the beach.”

“Destroy! What wrong with you, Wes? How you mean destroy? Is beach this. By tomorrow, the sea full it up again.” . . .

Somehow it seemed all wrong to me that they should even think of loading trucks from the beach just like that...and get away with it, then get paid for it. But I was helpless, and *I began to feel ridiculous. Like one man fighting against a large tide.* (148, emphasis added)

Forging a new path in the face of these challenges feels like a one-man battle that Wesley feels “ridiculous” fighting. Like Barker’s informants, Wesley sees how others get away with overt corruption and he recognizes the institutional loopholes that sanction it. It is, therefore, significant that Wesley’s father appears after this incident. More than two-thirds of the novel passes before we hear his father’s voice. Previously he is a shadow character in the background of Wesley’s and his mother’s life, living in the house and going to work, but never a real part of the action. After the beach incident, Wesley is unable to sleep and goes out on the porch late that night to clear his head. Approaching his favorite spot and chair, he finds his father already sitting there smoking a marijuana spliff:

And as I watched him, I realised that all the time I had been fooling myself that the chair was mine. Everything was his: the chair, the position of sitting, the way I held my head in my hands, how I set my feet on the ground – everything was his. *I had just been imitating him all my life.* (149, emphasis added)

Wesley's father has been an integral part of his life without Wesley really recognizing it. Because Ellis paints him as a background character up until this point, we as readers do not recognize the significance of his role either. As Wesley says, "If I am not careful, sometimes I feel my father is not a part of our lives, but sitting there with him made me realise he was our lives" (149). Describing his mother as "the flesh" and his father as "the bones," Wesley is able to finally open up and talk about all the frustrations from his new job and we feel good about their connection. His father simply listens and in the end advises him to not only tell his mother everything at some point, but also be clear about what he wants for himself. When Wesley responds "'But she not going wan' me leave,'" Wesley realizes for the first time that he has been mentally planning to make a change. Although his parents play fairly stereotypical gender roles (she as "the face of the family: beautiful, loud and precocious" and he as "the foundation and the strength" 149), his mother and father nevertheless become key influences in Wesley's ability to withstand the pressures at work.

After the discussion with his father, Wesley remains steadfast in his pursuit of an honest life and resists further temptations to sink deeper into trickery. When pay day comes again and Patrick submits his claims that he delivered twenty truck loads of sand, Wesley refuses to sign them insisting that there were only ten trucks. Patrick stares Wesley down with his "killer's stare," but Wesley is no longer affected by menacing gunman looks and

refuses to sign: “. . . I was beyond that now, and my hatred for him and what he represented gave me strength” (155). This is a major turning point for Wesley. He reaches a place within himself that can no longer be swayed by corruption or intimidated by violence. His father reminded him “you must know what you want” (151) and Wesley recognizes that it is not a life boxed in by the limited constructions of masculinity. Most likely frustrated with himself and his own collusion thus far, he takes a stand against contributing any more:

“So you going shoot me?” I asked him, much to the bewilderment of Mr [sic] Scott [AKA Scotty], Andrew and the two foremen who were there. When I spoke, my temper had risen and my heart began beating furiously. I was telling myself that I was as big as he, I was just as tall, I had a larger body, and that I would break his neck against the steel of the container walls before he could even reach for whatever gun I knew he carried on him. (156)

Toughness is now measured more by a physical body than by a gun. Although physicality is consistent with hegemonic definitions of manhood, Wesley taps into an inner strength that makes him confident in his own ability to resist violence. He is ready to attack the proverbial bull by the horns with his bare hands (like the two competing brothers in the novel *The Harder They Come*). He seems determined to create a different way of being for himself and it is significant that he was able to speak to his father beforehand.

However, like the turbulence metaphor that Mr. Johnson spoke of earlier, we know that “not everyone going survive” in these times of change. The competing pressures from the interwoven layers of corruption will somehow have to explode.

Although part of the corruption schemes, Scotty the foreman still wants the construction itself to move forward efficiently. One major challenge is Danny’s nagging and persistent presence on the site. Danny argues that Mullet has given him orders to make sure the fence is built where he is currently supervising, but Scotty sticks to the plan: “Well, trust me. Is a mistake.” Scotty turned to one of his foremen. “Nigel, beg you move that line for me. And show them where to start the digging.” (157) When Scotty learns that Danny still refuses to let the digging proceed, Scotty calls the police. Danny insists that the perimeter fence needs to be thirty yards in the other direction, but Scotty wants the police to help him enforce what the plans say. This is literally a battle over boundaries and a different type of Western showdown:

“Mr [sic] Scott, I feel you should wait till Mullet come,” Danny greeted us. He looked at the policemen, he looked at me, then at Patrick and his cronies. There was a nervous anger in his eyes. “Mullet say is here so the fence must go.”

“But I tell you,” Mr [sic] Scott said hotly, “I tell you, that it should be thirty yards back!”

“But how I mus’ know that?”

“I know, and I going show you.” So Scotty beckoned to the driver of the backhoe and to Nigel. Nigel loosened the line and picked up a large peg. The group followed as he did the measurement and hammered the peg into the ground. Then he sent a boy scampering across the other side while he measured through his instruments and indicated for the other peg to be hammered at that side.

“All right, now,” Mr [sic] Scott said. “Now you see where the damn line should be. Argument done. Come, backhoe man. You come, we don’t have damn time to waste.” The driver moved the tractor into place and raised its bucket into the air. As he did, Danny shouted that Mullet was coming. (158 – 159)

The digging proceeds and two big piles of dirt are scooped out of the ground. As the third pile is scooped, the tractor hits an obstacle:

As the bucket rose, it brought with it a large crate snagged to its blade. The crate was the length of a coffin and twice its width. The centre of it had been cracked and splintered by the previous blow of the blade, and the second try had latched onto its farthest edge. So, as it rose and broke free from the earth, it also began to break apart. And as it rose further into the air, it gave a dull sound, disintegrated and fell away from the blade of the tractor. And as it broke up, its contents of guns, bags of ammunition and explosives scattered in an arc prescribed by

the rising bucket of the tractor. Everyone froze at the spectacle before them. . . . All froze except Mullet, who by now had stopped running. He walked purposefully across the line, with a gun in his hand, unmindful of all who were around him or in the crowd. He walked straight toward us with an ugly scowl on his face, placed the gun at Mr [sic] Scott's head and fired it, twice. (159 – 160)

As everyone scatters, Wesley runs to the steel trailer to take cover with Danny running closely behind him, seemingly aiming in his direction. However, when he dives through the door, two other bodies crash in after him – one is Danny's and the other is Patrick's.

A gun fires in the small space of the trailer, sounding "like trapped thunder" (162). When Wesley regains his hearing and finally opens his eyes from his corner on the floor, he sees Danny leaning against the door they just flew through, a wounded Patrick lying in blood in the other corner and a gun on the floor between them all. Danny jokes about which of them to kill first and decides to take aim at Wesley because Patrick has already been shot twice:

He raised the gun, pointed it at me and pulled the trigger. I froze with my mouth open and my eyes closed. I thought I was dead. The gun clicked and nothing happened. When no sound came, I opened my eyes. He pulled the trigger again and shook the gun but nothing happened.

He threw the empty weapon at me. It came at my head and as I turned to avoid it, it slammed square into my jaw. I felt the flesh break and the blood flow. (162 – 163)

As if to signify that Wesley wants no part of gun violence, this gun is useless against him. It turns into something to pick up with your bare hands, like a stone, and Danny throws it just like that. However, Danny reaches behind and pulls out another gun that Wesley immediately recognizes as “*Skin’s gun!*” (163, italics in original). Like the wounded hero that shifts from humiliation to rehabilitation (Schubart in Slocum), Wesley finds new strength in his pain:

. . . all the memories of my friend, and of all the people I had loved, lost, wanted for and missed from my life, came to me with a might force. All the yesterdays came back to me. The room became my past and the person on the ground, bleeding in the corner, was Skin all over again. The fear in me was the fear for his life, and the danger in front was the danger of the space on the hill when I was all alone and was afraid to move for I knew that my death had been planned.

Excitement, then fear and the dread of the moment swelled in me. And I knew that I would kill Danny Bruck Foot that day if it took my life to do it. (163)

Wesley throws a kettle that had fallen when they crashed threw the door at Danny and jumps up with a broken table leg to smack his body and wrist.

The gun falls and they wrestle, but Wesley comes away with it and kicks Danny in the face before he can stand. Now holding the gun that his friend died trying to retrieve, Wesley aims:

I lifted the gun, and it was as if Skin was there with me, showing me, ensuring the safety was off. As if that day too had returned when we were in the bush near the river and he showed me how to fire it. And as Danny rose, I pointed the gun at him and I fired. The gun kicked and I fired again. He staggered in surprise. My feelings were in my throat, my temper had risen high, my heart beat wildly, my chest heaved and I fired again. This time he fell. I went to stand over him and I fired and fired until I hit his head and his blood splattered onto the door. (163 – 164)

Wesley is swept up not only in self-defense, but in vengeful violence like Django in the film *The Harder They Come*. All of his stifled emotions come through the muzzle of this gun, the first (and presumably only) gun he has held, and the symbol of how his housing scheme was drawn into the neighborhood warfare. However, we must remember that because that experience was like Wesley's first sexual experience, this gun is also like the woman he loses his virginity to. Losing your virginity in heterosexual sex is a huge part of what makes boys men in Jamaica (and elsewhere), therefore this gun also symbolizes Wesley's manhood. Like the phallogentric guns in *The Harder They Come* (film and novel), the holder of the gun becomes the "real"

man. With “real” man status, Wesley annihilates Danny. However, Patrick feels that Wesley is protecting him: “‘Wesley! Wesley! Thank you. You save me life.’ . . . ‘Help me up, Wesley. You save me life’” (164). But Wesley’s revenge does not end with Danny:

I turned to him, I raised the gun, and I fired. He stumbled, looked at me in surprise and held his chest where the bullet had just made a hole. And I raised the gun and I fired again, and I fired again...chest heaving, eyes brimming with hatred, snorting like an animal, my breath whistling through my nostrils, till the only sound in the room was the clicking of the hammer of the empty gun and the thunder of the knocking on the door. (164)

Standing between their two dead bodies, Wesley picks up the gun lying next to Patrick and cannot decide what to do next. He questions all of his decisions up to this point and rates them as inadequate because they were unable to spare any of his childhood friends:

I had kept silent for Stevie, now he walked the streets a madman; Skin found a gun and he was dead, I might have saved him if I had got him to the hospital instead of racing through the night into the hills; Spragga killed people without remorse and he was hunted and killed like a dog and blamed for a crime he did not commit. Now I had my murders, my circumstances. What should I do now to save myself?
(164)

Feeling trapped and considering suicide, Wesley lifts the gun to his head and drops it to his side a couple of times before the police finally break down the door. When one of the officers points his gun at him, Wesley wonders “why he did not kill me as policemen were supposed to do” but later realizes it is because they know each other: “He had invited me many times to join the police youth club, but I had never found the time” (165). He is forever the personification of bridging boundaries. Yet although Wesley repeatedly confesses “I killed them,” because he “did not want to have more memories [he] could not talk about,” the officer sends him home: “‘Go on home, Schoolboy,’ he insisted. ‘Go on home to you yard’” (165). His history of honesty grants him the freedom to go home. Confident of his innocence, they come to arrest him later that night out of mere obligation because others at the construction site heard him confess: “‘Come, Schoolboy,’ he said. ‘We have to take you’” (166). However, he had not said anything to anyone:

I had walked home as the policeman had instructed, and had been sitting silently on the bench in the back of my yard for six hours. I had not touched my dinner, nor had I exchanged a word with a soul. I just sat there on the bench with my hand behind my head waiting for them to come to me. (166)

Clearly he does not take his father’s advice to tell his mother everything because she screams when the police arrive and his sister, (another phantom character), asks what he did. His father is ironically not there. As the officers

tell him not to worry because it was clearly self-defense and he would be out on bail shortly, Wesley steps into another part of himself:

. . . as I walked through the cars I tried to be bold, tried to be upright and look straight ahead. But I did not know how to stand, did not know how to carry myself, nor how to be, as I did not understand what I had done that was so bad, and I could not fathom what could have been done to avoid it. *Neither could I see in the world I was leaving, that anything of significance was evaporating from around me.*

I felt free. (166 – 167, emphasis added)

His not knowing how to stand, how to carry himself or even how to be is an interesting comment given the fact that his father is not home – it is like he does not know how to be a grown man and has no fatherly guidance. Yet because he adds that he does not understand what he did that “was so bad,” this confusion is most likely linked to his life of general honesty. Wesley does not know how to move like he has done something wrong or bad because for the most part, he tries to live a life free of serious wrongdoing. As we see from the childhood chapters, he and his friends participated in a lot of immature wrongdoing. In the first chapter they are late for school and Wesley is chased by Red Head. In the second chapter, they cut school to go fishing with the older Patrick and Spragga who are both helping Mr. Johnson. In the third chapter, they follow Patrick and Spragga to hide in the cane fields to eat cane but almost get burned alive in a clearing fire. In the fourth chapter, they

go for a swim to wash the ash out of their clothes, eat stolen mangoes and get chased by the cane field ranger who shoots after them. The brush with death brings them all closer and eleven year old Wesley cannot remember ever being in so much trouble (99). Now on his way to jail seven or eight years later, these wrongdoings are literally child's play. The older he gets the more challenging this turns out to be and the more serious the consequences become. As if to compare childhood consequences with adult consequences, Ellis puts the fifth and final childhood chapter right after Wesley's arrest. Spragga, Patrick, Skin, Colin and Wesley plot how they were going to explain coming home so late and having no clothes. But the ranger brings their clothes to Skin's father and each of them gets a beating when they finally go to their respective houses later that night. Those beatings pale in comparison to the complicated adult world Wesley lives in now and he is glad to be leaving – there was nothing of significance that he will miss. Although his mother and sister are clearly part of the immediate world he was leaving, Wesley curiously makes no mention of them or even his father. However, thinking of his world as encompassing his childhood friends who were all gone, the neighborhoods wracked by war and violence, a job riddled with corruption on every level and the stress of collusion in it all, it makes sense that he finally feels free. *"Masculinity is very demanding"* (Ramirez 59) and clearly *"not everybody going survive"* (129).

Jail provides a peculiar place of peace and rest. Once there, Wesley falls into an endless silence:

They appointed a lawyer, but when he came, I stared at him and did not open my mouth. I did the same thing in court and the judge was so frustrated, he returned me to my cell saying he would give me three months to get my act together. The lawyer pleaded, but the judge insisted that I needed to open my mouth. He promised that if the lawyer was able to make me talk within that time, he would see us again. But I have refused to see the lawyer too.(170)

Whereas silence was previously his torment (with the keeping of various secrets), now silence becomes Wesley's comfort:

I know that one day I will have to give in to my parents, the lawyer and my friends and leave this place to face my innocence. And I wonder about them, those adults, those people who love me, who gave us life, who brought us up, whether their dreams are anything like mine. And if they understand or can imagine the secrets that children live with in their heads.

And Colin and I would try to find the good times to remember, like chevy chase and running naked from rangers in the cane fields. And *if I had not been trying to be a man*, I would cry every time he comes and beg him not to leave. For he is all I have that makes any sense. . . . he is

all that is left of us, of our dreams...when I see him I know my life has not been just an illusion. (171 – 172, emphasis added)

Although he says “the secrets that *children* live with in their heads,” I would argue that many of these secrets reside in the heads of boys/men. Moreover, boys are often socialized not to talk about their feelings but instead to “toughen up” and “take it like a man.” As Wesley says, if he was not “trying to be a *man*” he would cry. Ellis makes a key observation here because he lets the reader behind the shroud of masculinity that dictates that tears or any other signs of vulnerability are not “manly.” This is the myth of masculinity that Ivan wants us to buy into in the film and the Rhygin myth that we see recycled in the children’s game at the end of that novel. In this novel, Ellis clearly critiques the cow-bwoy version of masculinity and reminds us that these performances are really myths acting as cover-ups that often shield vulnerabilities. More importantly, the violent masculinities affect everyone – not just the boys or men trying to mimic the role.

As I was writing this chapter, a friend from Guyana was coming to cook and catch-up in the brief break that I was taking away from my computer. As we were getting a few missing ingredients from the store he received a phone call that kept him occupied for quite some time. I wondered why he did not arrange to call back later since we rarely have time to see each other but when he got off the phone, he was visibly tense. I asked him “what happened” and he revealed that his aunt was calling to tell him that his

cousin had told her abusive boyfriend that she was leaving and taking their two children with her. When she got off the bus, I presume later that day, he was waiting for her. I held my breath imagining what an already abusive man might do in retaliation, but my imagination was not prepared. My friend reported that the boyfriend threw acid in her face and she is now *blind*. He said it so matter-of-factly that I wasn't sure I had heard him correctly. "Blind?" I repeated. To which my friend replied, "And she has two kids. After she recovers she won't be able to see ever again." I asked him if he didn't think the retaliatory violence that his male cousins were sure to exact would further the cycle of violence and he simply said, "It's not like America. Back home people can literally get away with murder." People in America get away with murder and take revenge on others too, but his resignation to the inevitable retaliation, along with the viciousness of the boyfriend's attack, left me feeling numb. This was the way that he (the boyfriend) had learned to deal with his pain and vulnerability.

The abstractions of this project lie in films and in novels but the consequences are real. The lives of women and men, girls and boys, are forever changed and changing because of the violent definitions of what it means to be a man. *For Nothing At All* captures the futility of this model of masculinity and Ellis leaves readers to consider alternatives. As Linden Lewis argues in his 2005 Working Paper for the University of the West Indies's Centre for Gender and Development Studies,

An essentialist position would argue that all men must embrace a set of criteria of masculine behavior that mark them off as men. The question therefore would be, who decides on these criteria? And when do subordinate men get to speak in their own behalf? Some men, many of whom enjoy patriarchal privilege of one sort or another, feel duty bound to reproduce the status quo. They are uncomfortable with the notion of gender change, and because of this fear of change, they engage in a rigid interpretation of masculinity. . . . Rather than insist on reproducing the status quo, men might more productively spend their time, thinking about how they can contribute to the building of a new type of society that is based on free and democratic participation of men and women as equals. (27 – 28)

Lewis ultimately calls for “gender transcendence” which I think is an admirable goal (31). However, in the meantime I think it is equally important to pair that work with the strategy of Gary T. Barker who reminds us that “To believe change is possible – that fewer men have to die or kill or injure others to prove their manhood- requires finding hope and bright moments in violent places. . . . to find voices of resistance in the midst of men behaving badly” (155). Wesley’s voice is a warped version of one such story and it is somewhat similar to the stories in Barker’s study: “stories of mostly unrecognized and quiet dignity, courage, caring and positive coping” (157). As Barker continues,

Violent young men, . . . succeed in getting noticed. They attract young women. They cause unease among their peers and neighbours by their use of violence. They get headlines and frighten the middle class.

Many die in dramatic gunfights with rival gangs or with police. They are the subjects of seminars, *dissertations*, *movies*, and documentaries.

But the voices of resistance are mostly in the shadows. Their stories should be in the headlines . . . (157, emphasis added).

Wesley is a voice of resistance. However, given the violent resolution that he chooses and his feeling that nothing could be done to avoid it, Ellis complicates the notion of resistance and reminds us that there is a whole other section of people that straddle the sides of violence and peace. How do you avoid choosing sides if your world is marked into nothing but divided territory? And how do you hold onto your neutrality in the midst of neighborhood war? The way to cultivate alternatives certainly lies in shining a spotlight on the voices of peaceful resistance, but we must also be ready to unpack the dominant narrative to expose the hidden assumptions that lurk in those shadows as well.

CHAPTER THREE

In the antebellum South, the slave and the plantation described tangible circumstances; today the slave and the plantation describe a state of mind and the conditioning of the mind. (237)

– William C. Rhoden

Forming an identity around the Western represents a certain “conditioning of the mind.” As Charles Ramírez Berg explains in chapter two of this project, Hollywood Westerns can condition viewers’ minds into believing the Manifest Destiny myth of conquering a disdained Other. The slick silver screen portrayals cleverly retell what historically is a story based on conquest, genocide and imperialism. However, if you are ultimately the disdained Other, buying into that myth really means buying into a level of self-hatred. As we see in Ivan’s mimicry and Wesley’s coming-of-age tale, shaping an identity around this kind of mythic masculinity has nothing but self-destructive consequences. This is especially true for communities of color because as the disdained Other, it ultimately leaves the gun pointing at yourself because you enact violence on people that look like you. Pointing guns at each other in turn confirms the construction of the disdained Other as violent, savage and brutish. The construction of this savage brute is also a conditioning of the mind. However, when it comes to black men in particular, this construction taps into a historical legacy that dates back to slavery in the

United States (and beyond). As bell hooks points out, “Racist sexist iconography in Western culture during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries depicted black males as uncivilized brutes without the capacity to feel complex emotions or the ability to experience either fear or remorse. According to racist ideology, white-supremacist subjugation of the black male was deemed necessary to contain the dehumanized beast” (48). And Patricia Hill Collins astutely adds,

Historically, African American men were depicted primarily as bodies ruled by brute strength and natural instincts, characteristics that allegedly fostered deviant behaviors of promiscuity and violence. The buck, brute, the rapist, and similar controlling images routinely applied to African American men all worked to deny Black men the work of the mind that routinely translates into wealth and power. Instead, relegating Black men to the work of the body was designed to keep them poor and powerless. (152 – 153)

In this way, these Jamaican texts are connected to a much larger diasporic project of minstrelsy. White men (as well as a few black men) performed in blackface in minstrel shows during the 19th and early 20th century, and introduced audiences to what was then seen as an “authentic” depiction of black people and culture. The songs, jokes, dances in a typical minstrel show helped to shape assumptions about black people as a whole – blacks were thought to be child-like, lazy and infantilized. While this construction was the opposite of the violent black male rapist myth, both constructions worked to

legitimize the alleged inferiority of black people in the white racist imagination and both stereotypes were taken as indisputable truth – this is how black people are. In this way, the black brute image is connected to the minstrel tradition.

This idea of authenticity that “this is how black people are” represents another conditioning of the mind. This conditioning specifically casts black men as naturally violent; their authentic identity rests in savagery. In this regard, Michael Thelwell’s epigraph from the last chapter provides an interesting bridge to this chapter because violence continues to be the dominant defining feature of black masculinity in several Jamaican films. Recall the epigraph: “Behold my people: How violence does enfold them like a mantle. It sitteth upon their shoulders even as a garment” (9, *The Harder They Come*) Violence is connected to black people (men) like a garment that they carry with them regularly. It seems inherent and thereby synonymous with the myth of the black male rapist and cinematic versions of this stereotype are not new. However, the Jamaican films *Third World Cop* and *Shottas* reinforce those stereotypes in a way that also plucks the nerve of contemporary U.S. immigrant hysteria.

The legacy of the black brute in U.S. culture is a paradoxical construction of love and hate; it is a simultaneous attraction (as with the love and admiration of athletes and musicians) and revulsion (as with the black faces paraded across news programs for being caught in some crime). In

Edward Guerrero's words about black men in the U.S., "While we are treated to the grand celebrity spectacle of Black male athletes, movie stars, and pop entertainers conspicuously enjoying the wealth and privilege that fuels the fantasies of the consumer system, we are also subjected to the real time, devastation, and body count of a constant stream of faceless Black males on the nightly news" (272). This paradoxical imaging exists in Jamaica as well with popular reggae and dancehall artists drawing international attention to the lives in and conditions of impoverished communities where many of them originated in songs that have a massive global appeal (Bob Marley being a prime example). At the same time, many dancehall artists are criticized for glorifying the violence that takes place in their communities, as well as for the "slackness" or sexually explicit vulgarity in their lyrics and stage shows. This sets up a similar admiration/fear dichotomy with black Jamaican men as well. On the one hand, they are often stereotyped as these exotic superstars, yet on the other hand that exoticism can slide into tropical machete-wielding savagery. As Patricia Hill Collins says about African American men, "In some cases, the physical strength, aggressiveness, and sexuality thought to reside in Black men's bodies generate admiration, whereas in others, these qualities garner fear (153).

New (Third World) Sheriff in Town

The 1999 film *Third World Cop* plays with both sides of this paradox to ultimately re-inscribe the image of the black brute. The short introductory scene captures the themes of this chapter by immediately positioning the black male body as site of physical strength, fierce aggression and powerful sexuality. In a seemingly simple sequence, the viewer gets the complex message that “guns amplify sexualized power, projecting masculinity and violence, which encourages dehumanization and degradation” (King in Fruehling, 87). And in black male hands, guns are portrayed as even more violent and deadly.

The opening production credits begin to flash onto the screen and then cut away to a tight shot of a nightstand with a framed picture of a black man in a Jamaican police uniform, a small clock with a pendulum and an open package of Slam condoms. Although it is dimly lit to give the feeling of darkness, the condom’s slogan is still visible: “Studded for the Wickedest Ride!” More pre-show credits flash and then we cut back to black man’s hands tracing up a black woman’s back. Jump back to credits and then back to a close-up of a woman’s arms bent with elbows up on either side of her thrown back head. Her eyes are closed eyes and we hear what are presumably her moans over the instrumental reggae beat that begins to play. The shadow of a presumably male head across her chest, makes her mouth open breathily. The credits continue to interrupt what is clearly a sex scene

that proceeds in tight close-up shots. His left arm strokes her right leg, grabbing the foot that blocks a profile view of his bare back and buttocks. Credits. He licks the middle of her chest in an extreme close-up of her nipple, then delivers more licks under which her body writhes. Credits. A close-up of an ashtray on a table with a smoldering marijuana spliff (the tip possibly stained with lipstick), a police whistle and the fuzzy label of a Red Stripe bottle in the background. Credits. A panning shot across a floral table cloth reveals a torn condom wrapper, the cardboard package of three Slam condoms with the oiled body of real-life spokeswoman "Carlene the Dancehall Queen" in a red vinyl-looking bikini on its cover, handcuffs, an unlit cigarette and a Red Stripe bottle cap. Because "red stripe" is the neighborhood code for "police in the area" shouted by a boy supposedly selling cold drinks later in the film, the bottle cap sitting next to the handcuffs is particularly ironic ("red stripe" referring to the red stripe down the pant sides and around the hat crown of the Jamaican police uniform). Credits. A shadowy close-up captures his muscular body from his shoulders to his bare butt poking out just above the sheets. Her blue fingernailed-hands lightly dig into his flesh as he wriggles back and forth on top of her. Credits. Her left hand on top of his right hand guides his arm and hand over her breast, after which she opens her mouth in another breathy gasp. Credits. And so it continues for nine more brief close-up snippets of their intimacy. What is most interesting is that during this almost three-minute introductory display,

we never fully see his face. He is a dark silhouette that licks, kisses and pumps with flexed muscles, sweaty back and bare buttocks until someone knocks on the door that is just a few feet away from the bed. He is like a superstar athlete, supremely skilled in his “natural” craft – the work of the body. In this way he represents all black men across the African diaspora. Available for sexualized consumption, the camera lingers over parts of his body forcing our gaze to lie in the bed with them.

After the knock, the angle quickly shifts and we are now looking at the bed from a side view and for the first time can see his face (as well as hers). There is a single framed picture on the wall behind them of a woman’s portrait. The distance makes it difficult to determine exactly who is pictured, but the short hair, brown complexion and general features give the impression that it is the same woman in the bed. This would mean that they have a long-term relationship, but we never know for sure since she is not named and we never see her again after this scene. Going back to the knock, in one swift motion he pulls a gun out from under the pillow with his right hand, holds his weight up with his left arm above his bare-breasted partner and takes aim at the door: “Who dat?” This means that the first time that we see *his* face, we also see his bare muscular chest and muscular arms aiming a gun in *our* faces. He is sexuality, strength and aggression all in one, all in this moment, all within the blink of an eye.

His police partner's voice makes him put the gun back under the pillow and come to the door: "It's me Capone. Jacko." Here we see that the main character is named after the Italian American gangster Alphonse Gabriel Capone (otherwise known as Al Capone or "Scarface"). Al Capone's fame came from his criminal exploits in Chicago, Illinois as the organized crime boss of a group called the Chicago Outfit during the 1920s and 1930s in the U.S. More importantly, he was an historical figure that was both loved and hated by the public – a seemingly intentional choice for an admired and feared black brutish man. Apparently the real-life Capone wanted to change his image from gangster to community leader by creating neighborhood programs to help impoverished people (Schoenberg). This impulse adds another interesting layer to a character who is a Jamaican police officer given that the Jamaican police, (much like many U.S. police departments), have a bad reputation for being excessively violent, woefully corrupt and blatantly disrespectful of the communities in which they patrol. The character Capone is the noble hero in this film, so perhaps it is a subtle effort to inject some faith back into Jamaica's real police force.

Either way, Capone puts his gun back under the pillow, rolls off of his partner and gets up from his bed. As he rises, the shot shifts behind him and once again his naked butt and back dominate the frame, while her bent knee and calf sit in the shadowy foreground. Although he grabs a towel off of the bed behind him to wrap around his waist when he stands, the shot briefly

shows a portion of his genitalia dangling between his legs. Here again he is nothing but buttocks, back and arms shot from a low angle by the bed and because he was just having sex, we can assume that he is still fairly erect. He secures the towel and opens the door, but stumbles back from the sudden tumble of three men bursting in. His partner is pushed inside by a newly released criminal and his cronie, coming to take revenge on Capone (and his partner): "Me ah tell you me a come for yuh pussyhole" he spits at Jacko and Capone who have fallen against the side of Capone's bed (where the unnamed woman lays covering herself in startled fear). Jacko stands up to try and reason with the gunman, stressing to him that everyone will know he did the shooting because he just "get off." However, Capone is still sitting on the floor with his back against the bed, telling Jacko to sit down. The gunman agrees that Jacko should listen to "de boss" and sit, but Jacko continues to talk: "Be smart, you don' need this." Capone repeats his request for Jacko to sit down as he slowly inches his left hand underneath his pillow to get his gun, but the gunman gets frustrated and shoots Jacko in the head. As soon as Jacko falls, Capone immediately shoots the gunman as well as the other silent man standing in the background with a gun (that he is clearly unable to use effectively). After they both drop to the floor, Capone gets up and walks over to the shooter.

A low-angled shot captures the ceiling, a portion of the wall, the window and its curtains. A medium shot of the now sweaty Capone fills the

left side of the frame. We just saw him sweating on top of his lover but his chest was dry while he sat on the floor leaning against the bed. Now that he is sweating again, it invokes a sexualization of the scene. After two steps, his head hovers above the curtains and essentially looks like it is touching the ceiling. His towel is still around his waist and his torso is glistening – the gigantic black brutish buck personified (see Figure 3). The gun is now in Capone's right hand and the shot cuts to the first shooter lying in spatters of blood on the floor. Capone's right leg and right hand clutching the gun stand over him on the left side of the frame, while the rest of the screen shows the shooter with closed eyes and breathing laboriously. A quick cut takes us back to the medium low-angled shot of Capone against the ceiling with his sinewy arm slowly lifting a huge gun into the frame. Although the barrel points down at the floor, its foregrounded presence makes it appear larger than usual. When combined with Capone's pursed lips and stony stare, we feel like the gun is aimed towards us (like with most heroes in gunplay films). He cocks the hammer, growls a classic heroic one-liner, "Me ah go sen' you home, [dramatic pause], guilty as charged," and pulls the trigger with a clenched jaw that visibly contorts the side of his face into a menacing scowl. When the gun fires, the camera cuts back to a close-up of his framed, fresh-faced police photo on the nightstand as it is splattered with the intruder's blood. Additionally, the Slam condom carton is also visible and also partially splattered. Despite all of the other things that were on the nightstand, these

two are the only items in sharp focus and tightly framed. Previously, Carlene's face on the carton's cover photo is partially obscured by the handcuffs, but now her shiny bikini-clad torso, smiling face and blond hair are in full view (albeit her image is sideways as though she is symbolically lying down). The sexual overtones of the entire event are more than obvious. Capone is interrupted during sex and presumably does not climax. Carrying his erection to the door (his first gun), he falls back against the bed to pull out his second gun from under the pillow. He fires this second gun three times (the last time pornographically standing over his heaving, feminized victim), and the ensuing blood splatter is like symbolic ejaculate, signaling the end of the scene (like the formulaic plot in a pornographic movie). The blood spatters on his pristine police photo in his private home, signals that Capone is not afraid to get a little blood on his walls or on his hands. He is a "Third World" cop and they supposedly do things differently than cops in the "First World." This is the land of the savage Maroons who defied European conquest for multiple years. Therefore, this seems to be a break away from the idealized "Officer Friendly" model of community policing. There is a new sheriff in town and he is out to tame the "Wild West" of inner city Kingston.

Capone's double-phallus scene recalls Ivan's triple-phallus scene from the film version of *The Harder They Come*. Because Ivan also interrupts *his* sexual activity, he also presumably does not ejaculate either. Therefore, Ivan's release also comes through a ballistic phallus. He pulls out two extra guns

(after his penis) and kills three officers before running in his underwear through the night. In *Third World Cop*, Capone pulls out one extra gun (after his penis) and kills two “bad guys” (although his partner’s body leaves three total dead here too). As discussed in the first chapter, guns are phallogentric. Moreover, C. Richard King reminds us that “Guns provide a language for talking about sex, offering a set of cultural metaphors, . . . that inscribe power and conscribe pleasure” (89). He adds that “the body is imagined as a weapon, an instrument of power and control, and apparatus of appropriation and penetration, even if softened by notions of love” (89). However, I would argue that even though the body is indeed appropriated, a *black* male body is generally not softened by notions of love. A black male body is primarily cast as an instrument of power and control, to be both feared and admired. Yet black brute iconography is definitely an image of pure fear. Capone’s massive, shiny, sweaty, muscled frame towers over us as viewers, with the gun – another shiny, black instrument protruding in the foreground that seems like a natural extension of his arm. He is both beautiful and bestial. Capone is presented as a new lethal weapon, but unfortunately his character and the overall plot re-inscribe the same old story. According to the DVD case, *Third World Cop* is “the highest grossing film ever in Jamaica.” Given that the film draws on the historical gender ideologies of black men as violent brutes, this makes perfect sense.

Authenticity and the Un-’s

The counterpart to this violent menacing image is the image of a non-threatening black man in service to whites. This construction goes back to slavery in the image of “Uncle Tom” who stood for “the Negro servant who was domesticated under slavery” (Collins 167). This caricature is “friendly and deferential . . . loyal both to dominant societal values such as law and order as well as to individuals who seemingly upheld them; . . . safe . . . defined neither by his sexual prowess nor by any hint of violence” (Collins 167). Most importantly, he does not challenge white authority. Patricia Hill Collins reminds us that the U.S. capitalist marketplace uses these caricatures to sell products because the men they represent comfort and become every white person’s safe “black buddy” (Collins 167). As she points out, this pattern stretches from Uncle Ben (whose image sells rice and other items) to Bill Cosby (selling Jello products) to Michael Jordan and even Tiger Woods. This image of the loyal servant is re-worked into the contemporary character of the black buddy who helps the white hero in numerous television and film presentations. Collins discusses the U.S. television programs *I Spy*, as well as U.S. films *Lethal Weapon*, *48 Hours*, *Beverly Hills Cop* and *Grand Canyon*. In each of these, the loyal, asexual, nonviolent, black buddy or “sidekick” provides comic relief and helps the hero somehow get in touch with his inner self. As Collins says, these sidekicks essentially perform “the emotional labor long associated with women” and are therefore feminized (171). Moreover, they

represent everything that the hero is not because masculinity is defined in a hegemonic hierarchy known as hegemonic masculinity. Collins's summary about the United States is also useful to consider here:

. . . hegemonic masculinity is installed at the top of a hierarchical array of masculinities. All other masculinities, including those of African American men, are evaluated by how closely they approximate dominant social norms. Masculinity itself becomes organized as a three-tiered structure: those closest to hegemonic masculinity, predominantly wealthy White men, but not exclusively so, retain the most power at the top; those men who are situated just below have greater access to White male power, yet remain marginalized) for example, working-class White men and Latino, Asian, and White immigrant men); and those males who are subordinated by both of these groups occupy the bottom (for example, Black men and men from indigenous groups). Moreover, hegemonic masculinity *requires* these marginalized and subordinated masculinities. (186, italics in original)

While I agree with Collins's racial hierarchy in the U.S., I believe the current hysteria around immigration would place Latino men closer to the bottom of the hierarchy heap. They may be just as reviled as African American men in this historical moment, particularly if coded as working-class and unable to speak English. Yet this still does not shift or improve the status of African

American men. In the Caribbean, models of hegemonic masculinity work similarly. However, the categories of the three-tiered structure work a little bit differently. Natasha Barnes comments on this hegemonic hierarchy as it works in Jamaica:

. . . Jamaican “brown” identity is one of many Caribbean identities that were constituted ‘between the extremes of “black” and “white” . . . and whose ambiguous categorization did not hinder their social concreteness. . . . To be a Jamaican “brown” is to have membership in a small, privileged mulatto oligarchy that was the result of generations of careful mulatto breeding, which was socially distinct from other mixed-race communities. Phenotypically light-skinned and curly-haired, “browns” symbolized an ideally creolized configuration of Afro-Anglo moral, social, and aesthetic registers. “Brown” men, . . . were the inheritors of the emergent nation’s political and mercantile institutions, while “brown” women were the staple choices for island beauty queens. Together, they were the very picture of modern Jamaica, playing to symbolic contrast with Jamaica’s majority black constituencies, whose pejorative designation as “bongos” and “naygas” symbolized the degree to which their Africanization banished them to the margins of the nation. (110 – 111)

In the context of Jamaica, the three-tiered structure oscillates between black, white and “brown” and is informed by class. However, a large part of

hegemonic masculinity rests on *behaviors*, so dominant masculinity is affirmed by what is seen as culturally/socially acceptable behavior for men (and boys). Therefore, the marginalized and subordinated masculinities in these communities help to define who/what is a “reel/real” man. In *Third World Cop*, Capone is clearly a “real” man – the opening scene of his expressed strength, aggression and heterosexuality immediately lets us know. However, the men (and women) that exist *around* Capone also let us know. “Hegemonic masculinity is fundamentally a dynamic, relational construct” (Collins 186). Therefore, these marginalized men (and women), give Capone’s character even sharper definition because they are all of the *un-“manly”* things that he is not. They help to flesh out what the film defines as heroic or “manly” and therefore deserve attention.

Floyd

Floyd is Capone’s new police partner in Kingston. Capone is transferred to the Kingston police station after spending four years in the quiet town of Port Antonio because his supervisor believes his “talents are wasted around here.” Since she feels that “they need more men like you on the front line” and the ministry has created a new team for organized crime in Kingston, she recommends him for the transfer and he is accepted. Capone is excited by the news because he is from Kingston and has not seen home in a long while. Meanwhile in the Kingston station, the supervisor tells Floyd that

his partner's leave has been extended because he is not getting any better. Apparently he is on leave recovering from injuries sustained in some unknown skirmish, but Floyd stresses to the supervisor that "I did tell him to wait for backup." When the supervisor lets Floyd know that Detective Boyd AKA Capone will be his new "squaddie," Floyd thinks he has heard the name before. His supervisor confirms that he must have heard the name before because the "First day he shot three men in a hold-up, no backup. First day! They fear 'em down dere." When Floyd shows some reservation, the supervisor reassures that Capone will be a "great asset to us here." When Floyd expresses that he does not think he would be the "right squaddie for Capone," the supervisor reminds him that he is the only available man and that all he would need to do is "show 'em the ropes" since Capone is from Kingston and knows the area. The supervisor thanks him for agreeing as Floyd gets ready to express further hesitation. And so it becomes official.

The first time we see Floyd and Capone together, they are patrolling through town in Capone's unmarked car. As Capone drives, Floyd puts his gun on his lap as they approach a "bad part of town" and advises Capone to do the same. Capone merely chuckles, lightheartedly dismissing the comment. When a stoplight positions them right next to another car with two young men bopping to their obnoxiously loud dancehall music, Capone purposefully looks over at them from his driver's seat. Both vehicles have their windows open so the music takes over both interiors. Floyd is right next

to them on the passenger side, and he is so close that he could touch their driver's door if he stuck his arm out of the window. As Floyd averts his eyes, Capone holds a stony stare, peering over his sunglasses that he pushes down on his nose to look at them more directly. The young men return his silent stare while bouncing to their music, but drive off when the light changes. Floyd exhales and Capone slowly drives off. When Capone says, "Boy, me scared o' town," Floyd agrees with a rhetorical question: "*You* scared?" But Capone responds with a twist: "Scared wha' me could do to *dem*." Floyd laughs and says he has heard that Capone's gun respects no one. But when Capone smiles and asks Floyd "What's your story?" Floyd simply responds with "Me have no story. Me just a simple squaddie."

As Westerns attest, as well as Ivan and the boys in the novels *The Harder They Come* and *For Nothing At All*, you are not memorable if you do not have a story. Moreover, you are not really a man at all because legendary stories follow "reel/real" men (even if it is all the way to their graves). Capone's story precedes him. As Floyd supervisor tells it, Capone is not the "loose cannon" Floyd calls Capone when hearing of his first-day gun battle in Port Antonio. Instead the supervisor corrects, "Him a *cannon*!" On the other hand, Floyd is definitely not a cannon. Standing in front of the supervisor's desk it is obvious that he is not a beacon of hegemonic masculinity. He wears a floppy baseball cap and his potbelly strains the fabric of his drab t-shirt. He has on a gold chain that seems more utilitarian than fashionable, and his gold

wedding band leaves us with the feeling that Floyd is most likely not having the same kind of headboard-shaking sex that opens the film. This portrait makes Floyd asexual, nonviolent, comforting, clean-cut and middle-class – all of the qualities that Patricia Hill Collins remind us that black screen sidekicks tend to embody (168 – 169). More interestingly, this more “soft” version of manhood is ultimately deemed *inauthentic* and often not respected by younger black men because it is seen as supporting the white dominated status quo. Collins shows how Bill Cosby’s character on the 1980s U.S. television program *The Cosby Show* captures this sentiment:

The image of Cosby’s character set the template for middle-class Black masculinity – he was friendly and deferential; he was loyal both to dominant societal values such as law and order as well as to individuals who seemingly upheld them; he projected a safe, nonthreatening Black identity; and he was defined neither by his sexual prowess nor by any hint of violence. . . . His role on *The Cosby Show* provided White families with images of a friendly African American who visited their living rooms to entertain them. If the show became too controversial, that is, too closely associated with racial issues, it could be dismissed by turning off the television. Like Uncle Tom, Black buddies are useful only if they are clearly committed to the American way of life. (167)

Floyd is deferential, loyal and safe. Although he carries a gun, the running joke of the film is that he is always calling for “back-up.” Remember he reminds his supervisor that he urged his former partner to wait for backup. So when Capone later spies the same two young men from the stare-down stopped in front of a warehouse, he speeds down a one-way street against traffic. Floyd unsteadily reminds him that it is a one-way street, but cannon Capone makes his own rules. He lets Floyd know: “We run tings, tings nuh run we!” (a refrain Capone repeats to Floyd later, as well as the name of one of the soundtrack songs and subtitle on the DVD case). Capone screeches the car into park and cocks his gun. Floyd nervously asks if he is not going to wait for backup and Capone lets him know, “Nobody’s gonna cramp my style today, yuh understand me? C’mon!” And he jumps out of the car and goes into the warehouse after the two guys. Nervous and cussing, Floyd remains in the car, immediately getting on the dispatcher to call the base for “backup, backup, backup!” By the time Floyd makes it into the warehouse, complete with bullet-proof vest, Capone has killed the two guys who ran in, plus a third already in the warehouse. The three were unpacking guns hidden amongst charity goods in a barrel addressed to a local church. Capone’s “manly” instincts helped to ferret out this daylight crime and land them on their first case. Just like his first day in Port Antonio, Capone kills three men again, without backup. And although Floyd carries a gun and even pulls it out on occasion, he never fires a single shot throughout the entire film.

During the final shoot-out, he lays on the car seat as bullets fly all around him, frantically calling the base for backup. Capone tells him to go arrest the neighborhood Don who is running into the bush with a wounded arm. Since the Don already wears a prosthesis in place of his other arm (thus the name "Wonie," as in One-y for his one arm), Capone only gets Floyd to leave the car by reassuring him that Wonie is unarmed (literally and figuratively) because he has been shot in the arm without the prosthesis. Floyd runs after him across a field and chases him into the bush where Wonie's prosthesis gets entangled in shrubs. Floyd does not have to fire a single shot. He simply stands and laughs while watching Wonie trying to free himself. Gun now by his side, Floyd is emboldened to say, "we run the grease engine, tings nuh run we." As he spits out the second half of his version of Capone's saying, Floyd lifts his gun up to the side of his face with his left hand and his voice is a growl. But since he ran up with his gun poised for potential fire in his *right* hand, we all know, (including Floyd), that this is merely a puffed-up show. Wonie warns Floyd that he (Wonie) is a "cunning bird . . . hard man fe' dead." Floyd sucks his teeth, walks over, points the gun at Wonie's head with his *left* hand and clicks handcuffs on the prosthesis wrist with his right hand with a joke: "back inna your cage bird man." Floyd is laughable comic relief, a minstrel.

Although Floyd is (subordinately) heterosexual, his fear and trepidation stereotypically overlaps with the U.S. caricature of a "sissy,"

“punk” or “faggot” – the Caribbean equivalent generally being the insult of “battyman.” These labels imply that someone is gay (whether in actuality or not), weak, effeminate and less than a man. Patricia Hill Collins extends her discussion of the sidekick and black buddy in film by explaining how the “sissy” is another version of inauthentic black masculinity in the U.S. The representation of gay black men in many African American films portrays them as “peripheral characters, often in comedic roles that border on ridicule . . . [whose characters work] to support the heterosexuality of other males” (171). More specifically, she explains that these caricatures “[work] to uphold constructions of authentic Black masculinity as being hyper-heterosexual” (174). They join the image of the middle-class buddy or sidekick in drawing clear boundaries around what is assumed to be an authentic black man, a “real” man. And in U.S. popular culture, film, television and hip-hop reinforce the notion that black male authenticity is urban, working-class, athletic, criminal thuggishness. bell hooks critiques the phoniness in these assumptions when she says, “Lots of young black men are walking around assuming a gangsta persona who have never and will never commit violent acts. Yet they collude with violent patriarchal culture by assuming this persona and perpetuating the negative racist/sexist stereotype that says ‘all black men are carriers of the violence we dread’ (56).

Similar encoding takes place in *Third World Cop*. Capone is from Kingston, born and raised in Dungle, a well-known, inner-city housing

scheme. He is athletic, (in bed and on the football field), and there is a criminal “bad boy” element to him. When he leaves his supervisor in Port Antonio, she says, “Your methods of crime fighting may be effective, but they’re not always right.” This edge of rogue criminality is what makes the Kingston supervisor feel that Capone will be “an asset” to their organized crime unit and it is what enables Capone to eventually be able to crack the gun smuggling case. It is also what has presumably been missing from their force all this time. Although there is another rogue officer named “Not Nice,” he is a crooked cop who gives confidential police information to Wonie and therefore must die in the end (at the hands of Capone of course). Not Nice might have been from downtown, but he ironically lacks a moral code. Capone is like the heroic cowboy that only uses violence when pushed to do so. This assumed restraint is often romantically attached to the authenticity of the urban rogue. He has the capacity to hurt you if he wants/needs to, but his “cool” balances his simmering hot temper. Moreover, he is from downtown, the assumed center of “cool.” Barry Chevannes captures the positive meaning of “downtown” in Jamaica, which is part of a longstanding association of black urban communities with what is considered “cool” in the outsider’s imagination: “. . . downtown has its peculiar attractions for some uptowners, particularly men. Downtown is where one finds the cutting edge in Jamaica’s music culture, where dance-hall fashion statements originate, the Jamaican patois acquires new words and expressions, [and] where men come to have a

“good slam [sex] from a ghetto gyal” (153, italics in original). These assumptions in the popular imagination do not erase the negative stereotypes of what it means to live in downtown Kingston. The harsh realities of high unemployment, poor housing and soaring crime rates often leave residents feeling “shame of living there, and the desire to escape” (Chevannes 156) – not unlike residents living in ghettos in other inner cities around the world. But in the movies, black male authenticity stems from these roots and these roots are reinforced as authentically black. Capone manages to escape to Port Antonio for four years, but his home is in Kingston. So he straddles a certain assumed sophistication that Port Antonio represents along with the raw grit from the streets. Remember that Ivan in the novel of *The Harder They Come* brings a moral notion of justice from the country to combine with the hard-knock lessons that he picks up in the urban streets. Therefore, it is this combination that is portrayed as true star-bwoy quality and idealized masculinity.

Even though we know from Ivan in both the film and novel of *The Harder They Come* that this model of cow-bwoy masculinity is not sustainable, it is nevertheless painted as an attractive identity to other men. What young man would not want to be considered “cool?” Additionally (and maybe more importantly), it is also held up as attractive to *women*. Because women are a key component in the relational dynamics that help to shape “authentic” hegemonic masculinity, it is worth looking at the role of women in the film. If

Floyd is the first “un-” in the list of *un*-manly things that stand as foil to Capone’s manliness, women are the second.

Women

Linden Lewis reminds us that “There is a sense in which men in society collectively define masculinity for themselves, but they are always cognizant of the influence of women in their definition. In short, women help to shape the general terrain of masculinity” (95, 2003). Women’s part in that definition is in a subordinated role. As part of her extensive participant observation study of an inner-city community in Kingston called Southside, Imani Tafari-Ama points out that the “subordination of women is an inevitable outcome of a system of male domination based on violence” (47). In *Third World Cop*, women definitely play a secondary yet instrumental role. They provide some of the critical ways in which hegemonic masculinity is classified.

The first woman we see is the nameless naked sex partner from the opening credit scene, who might be Capone’s girlfriend. The enacting of his heterosexuality on her body, helps to establish his position as “real” man. However, after his (ballistic) gun fires, we never see her again.

The next woman is Capone’s supervisor in Port Antonio. She is essentially responsible for sending him back to his Kingston roots because she is the one who recommends his transfer. She is also the one who gives him a

motherly chiding that his methods of crime fighting are “not always right.”

After he leaves his symbolic mother’s house in Port Antonio, we never see her again either.

There are other women that we see but who do not really speak. There are women in the dancehall, as well as three different women auditioning for Wonie, (and the crowd of onlookers in his club), on a stripper pole while he makes phone calls and conducts business from his cell phone. But they are fleeting background characters. Carla is a background character but she is a regular presence in most scenes because she seems to be Ratty’s girlfriend.

Ratty is the younger brother of Lion, Capone’s friend who is killed by a rival gang (and it is interesting to note that Capone admits that he joins the police force because of Lion’s death in order to “get revenge”). When Capone reunites with Ratty and all of his other Kingston neighborhood friends on a football pitch, Capone calls everyone’s name out as he gives them firm hugs and hand slaps. When he hugs Carla, Capone only calls her “pretty girl.” We find out that her name is Carla much later in the film when Ratty and his friends are going through one of the infamous church charity barrels that have guns stashed between the food in their contents: “Carla get the crocus bags.” She silently goes off to get the bags that will hold the guns. After Capone later discovers that Ratty’s gang is helping Wonie to smuggle in the guns, Carla and Ratty are watching the news in their basement hideout. She has her head on his bare shoulder, swirling her fingers through his short locs

as he separates marijuana buds from a stem. He requests her help again:

“Carla get the Bible.” This is an interesting scene because Ratty plans to make his marijuana spliff with a page torn from the Bible. He uses Psalm 23, verses 4 – 6, because he finds out from Capone that Wonie is plotting with officer Not Nice and one of Ratty’s supposed friends to kill him. When the supposed friend (named Deportee, a stigma we will return to later) comes to their hideout with carry-out food, he sits at a table behind Ratty with a gun in his waistband poised to shoot Ratty in the back. After Carla gets the Bible, she creeps up behind Deportee and puts a gun to his head as Ratty lights his Psalm 23 spliff. With Deportee surprised and frozen by Carla’s gun, Ratty has time to stand, turn to face them and start reciting the biblical verses. She moves from Deportee’s back to his side, all the while keeping her gun aimed at his head. Ratty eventually shoots Deportee in the chest in a low-angle shot reminiscent of Capone’s first killing in his Port Antonio home. However, he would not have had the chance to do so without Carla’s help. A female body is once again used as a springboard for proving masculinity. And as Tafari-Ama cites, “Popular beliefs and norms hold that men *prove* themselves as men when they kill” (47, italics in original). Like Capone’s first scene, Ratty is also bare-chested and firing his big gun in the presence of a woman. Similar to Capone’s sex partner, after Ratty’s (ballistic) gun fires, we never see Carla again either. Both women served their purpose.

Rita, on the other hand, is a bit more complicated. She is Capone's childhood sweetheart. They both inquire about each other's well-being and are excited by their reunion at one of Ratty's neighborhood dances. She tells Capone that she is now an "ICI – Informal Commercial Importer" but Ratty sneaks up behind her and adds "higgler" over her shoulder – the local name for female street or market vendors. The more formal name takes into account the impact that women's work has on the Jamaican economy with many women making frequent trips to nearby countries such as the U.S. to buy goods, and bring them back to the island for sale. Chevannes describes them as a "subset of higglers" who have a level of independence because they are able to establish their own "economic niche" (202). This means that Rita herself is always wearing the latest fashions and when she and Capone go out for dinner one evening, she wears a snake-skin print catsuit. A man sitting near the parking lot with two friends calls out to her: "Fatness, yuh sexy. Ah wahn talk to yuh, you know." When Capone comes around the car, the man dismisses him and tells Rita that Capone "cyan manage de wuk [can't handle her in bed]." Capone tells him that he "[owes] the lady an apology," but Rita holds on to Capone's arm whispering that it is all right. The man lifts his shirt to reveal the wooden handle of a small knife in his waistband which makes Capone smile. Although Rita still tries to soothe him by placing her hand on his chest, Capone slowly repeats his request and lifts *his* shirt to reveal the handle of his big black gun sticking out of his waistband. The man and his

friends promptly stand and bow: "Yes boss." Cowering and backing away, he stutters some form of apology and the three of them run off to Capone's voice booming off-screen: "Run 'way!" Capone is proven as the alpha male because of his big black gun (which we understand is an instrument of fear), but it is Rita's body that acts as the battleground/turf. Like the previous examples, a female body is once again used as a springboard for proving masculinity.

Homosexuality

This idea of the female body proving one's masculinity takes an ironic twist during a key turning point in the film. Unable to find Ratty on his own, Capone goes to Rita for her help (the one person he turns to for consolation during other difficult times). He wants to catch Ratty so that he can talk to him and help him turn his life around. After one failed attempt, Capone comes to her house. Without discussion, she begins to go through her closet of imported clothing. As she looks back and forth between his body and the different outfits, he stands nervously in the middle of her room: "Me countin' on you" he says, but looks worried and anxious as she grabs a brown wig and other accessories. The scene jumps to her bedroom door opening and Capone walks out in a full shot dressed as a woman with the brown shoulder-length wig, black pants, and a black sheer blouse revealing a black bra underneath. There is an orange patterned scarf knotted at his neck and he is wearing

eyeshadow, lipstick and false red fingernails. He squeamishly asks Rita, “how me look?” and she jokes with him: “Dainty. If I was a man I would deal wid you. Rrrrraawwl [she growls with a smile].” He responds, “Fuck, wha me a go do wid dese? [what am I going to with these?]” as he holds up a gun in each hand – the implication being that now as a woman, he has no place for such things. She suggests a “scandal bag” and puts both guns in a black plastic bag that she loops over his fingers, cautioning him to “Mind your nails.”

Outside in disguise, Capone comes across the same street harasser that he made apologize to Rita earlier. He is sitting by himself this time, smoking a spliff and chatting to women as they pass by. He tells one woman “yuh no ready for dis yet” as she walks down a short step without turning. When disguised Capone comes from the opposite direction, walking up the short step, the harasser tugs on his spliff and lets Capone, (interestingly seen as a her), know “gyal, I wan give you a talk.” Capone walks past but then turns as the harassment continues. Seeing his/her reversal, the harasser says, “Ah oh, so you a come back. Yuh wan hear wah me have ah say.” But Capone walks over, punches him in the face and he falls off of his perch mid-chat.

It is a comical moment, but it is funny for two reasons. First, there is the implicit assumption that no woman would/could do this, so we as audience laugh at the harasser’s stunned surprise. Women are supposedly defenseless against these onslaughts without male intervention. While this

highlights the fact that men *should* play a primary role in eradicating this kind of disrespect, the sad reality is that many will not. It also denies Rita any agency in protecting or speaking up for herself. As Kelvin Quintyne points out, this scene “gives the power to successfully confront the disrespect aimed at women . . . [to] Capone . . . instead” (37). In this way, even though it is disguised, a symbolic “female” body still acts as the springboard to prove male toughness and dominant masculinity, while simultaneously reinforcing sexism. The second reason this moment makes audiences laugh is because even in disguise, Capone looks nothing like a woman. He appears to be a drag queen at best, and any onlooker (male or female) can tell the difference at such close range. Because the street harasser cannot, we are invited to laugh at the ridiculousness of his being fooled (although some people might want to blame his confusion on his liberal puffing of marijuana). However, given that this is one *man* lustily looking at another *man*, this is also a homoerotic moment. Homophobia in the Caribbean is widely documented and, in the words of Tara Atluri, “homosexuality is dismissed, loathed and ignored by mainstream Caribbean culture” (4). She goes on to say, “that this fear of homosexuality keeps gender roles sharply intact, thereby normalising [sic] sexism” (4). Homophobia, heterosexism and patriarchy ultimately reinforce sexism. With the widespread popularity of dancehall lyrics that condemn homosexuality, Jamaica has a particular reputation for being one of the most homophobic islands in the archipelago. Linden Lewis elaborates:

In the case of Jamaica, in trying to understand the level of hostility toward homosexuality and homosexuals, one has to take into consideration the wider scope of violence in the society. . . . Not only does the society have a history of physical abuse and attacks on gay men but there have been known cases of homicide and dismemberment of homosexuals in Jamaica. These acts of brutality make Jamaica perhaps the least tolerant Caribbean society of people with different sexual orientations. (110, 2003)

Gay men are seen as “gender traitors who violate the accepted rules of gender identity and gender performance” (80, Hope). Therefore, if the street harasser is essentially making sexual advances to what is obviously a man, he is punched for his potential transgression. He is punched in defense of alpha masculinity and he is punched to underscore Capone’s hyper-heterosexuality (which ultimately defends heterosexism). As Atluri says, “The male gaze, which captures and defines women is enforced. It is meant for women, not for other men” (17). If Capone were to ignore the advances, then he would be like the other “weak” women who walk by without challenging the behavior.

Capone’s disguise also enables him to sit in Wonie’s bar and overhear the plot between Wonie, Deportee and Not Nice to kill Ratty. As a woman, Capone becomes both visible (and susceptible to more harassment) and invisible (able to be in the bar). While eavesdropping in the bar, a drunk older man makes sexual advances towards Capone in “disguise.” He stumbles over

and throws his arm around Capone's shoulders who promptly elbows him away. He soon comes back with a stale pick-up line, but Capone shoves him away for a second time. Once again, the joke rests on the ridiculousness of this supposed confusion and the homophobic impulse to protect heterosexuality. Frustrated with the drunk's persistence and having learned of Ratty's hideout, Capone walks out. As he leaves the bar, he runs into Ratty across the street. Ratty is also in disguise as a beggar on the side of the road (another invisible identity). Capone tells Ratty of the plot he just overheard and offers him a deal in exchange for his help catching Wonie smuggling guns. However, Capone only reaches him after Ratty and Carla later kill Deportee (yet another invisible identity) when Ratty calls Capone to follow through with his proposed deal.

(God)Father Figures

One important way that men define their transition to manhood is by becoming fathers. Capone is like a father-figure to Ratty and he feels a sense of obligation to look out for his dead friend's younger brother, who he also sees as a "likkle brother." He wants to save him and so confronts Ratty with the information that he finds out about how Wonie brings in guns for Ratty to sell in the underground market. When Capone presses Ratty about what the guns are supposed to be for, Ratty retorts that the government does not care about his part of town, investors ignore the area and he cannot get a real job

because of his address. Barry Chevannes confirms this discrimination in his study of one Kingston community:

Uptowners regard downtown as a place to be avoided, because of political and gang-related violence; many young uptown dwellers born since the 1970s have never been there. Downtowners have mixed feelings about uptown. On one hand, uptown is where the snobs and the scornful, who stereotype downtowners, live; on the other hand, it is the symbol of achievement, the place downtowners aspire to live one day. . . . If you live downtown, you live among people who know “right from wrong” but practise [sic] the art and science of survival more. Chances are, particularly if you are a young man, *you will never get a job uptown by giving your correct address*, unless as a security guard. (152, emphasis added)

Ratty’s frustration is understandable and it eerily harkens back to a comment that he makes the morning after reuniting with Capone. While out fishing from their old location by the docks, Ratty reflects on the progress of his life thus far: “Me nah reach there yet, but one day by de hook, [dramatic pause] or by de crook” he hopes to build a “bigger life.” But (cannon) Capone ironically argues that “guns only lead to self-destruction.” When Ratty challenges that “police only use their guns fi kill,” Capone insists that without the police “it would be a worse war zone and no pickney [children] can flourish in a war zone.” Capone tells Ratty that he can use his talent to throw

dances and organize shows to get out of the ghetto like he did, but Ratty is not convinced. When Capone warns that “you reap what you sow” and he does not want to have to come for him, Ratty seems mildly amused and walks away. As a figurative father, Capone is losing his influence over Ratty. Barry Chevannes reminds us that Afro-Caribbean boys learn very gender-segregated roles that rely on this father/son connection:

A great part of their socialization is accomplished outside the home, in public spaces and among their peers. At this point it is a father’s responsibility to exert control over his son, in order to ensure that he grows up into a socially responsible person and that he does not deviate from the values taught in the home. (132, *Betwixt*)

Because Ratty walks away, we recognize this as a moment of challenge where the child-figure steps away from the father-figure. Throughout the conversation the camera alternates between over-the-shoulder close-ups of each of them talking to each other and they take up an equal amount of space. However, in the final scene the roles switch once again.

After Capone and Ratty take down Not Nice, (while Floyd is arresting Wonie in the bush), Ratty is crouched down behind a car door burning the testimony that he gives against Wonie in exchange for a new identity and plane ticket to Antigua. Ratty now appears physically smaller than the standing Capone, but he still refuses to be deferential. He tells Capone that he will take the new identity, but then come back to Jamaica later on as a bigger

hero. Capone reminds him that they had a deal, but Ratty refuses to listen or give back the gun Capone lends to him during their shoot-out against Not Nice and Wonie. In a low-angled medium shot, Capone asks, "Wah? Yuh no respect me no more?" his eyes downcast as if literally looking at small child.

But this is a rebellious child disinterested in the "values" Capone wants to relay. Still crouched behind the car door, Ratty begins inching the gun off of the car seat while reciting *his* version of Ecclesiastes III: "For everyting dere's a season. A time to love, a time to hate; a time fe peace, a time fe war." Ratty then springs up from behind the car door (as if symbolically growing into the man he wants to become), and screams "a time fe kill!" while firing at Capone. Capone leaps out of the way into the grass, and returns fire. His bullets hit Ratty in the chest, and Capone finishes the recitation with his own lines: "A time to born, a time to die," as Ratty slides down the side of the car to his death. Another low-angled shot frames Capone walking up to Ratty's sitting body. He is back in a dominant position, and closes Ratty's eyes while choking out the admonishment, "You's a fool Ratty. You coulda had a life, but you choose to die."

When Capone offers Ratty the deal outside of the bar in their double disguises, he tells him that he only has three choices: to die, go to jail or inform on Wonie. In the culture of the streets, being an "informa" is one of the most dishonorable things men can do. It is thoroughly inauthentic and reinforces the idea that only women talk and express their inner secrets, while

“real” men are able to “tough it out.” Therefore, it makes sense that Ratty tries to reclaim his manhood in this way; the code of the streets is more influential than the lessons from his father-figure. This reminds us that Ratty’s father is never discussed and noticeably absent (perhaps a subtle commentary from the filmmakers). Ratty does not want to necessarily protect Wonie. Instead he is aware of the code of silence that is attached to maleness. As Barry Chevannes says, “. . . it is not [that] truth is not a value, but that truth is subordinated to the necessity to survive and to the obstruction of the enemy” (154, *Betwixt*). Unfortunately, these narrow options leave limited opportunity for success.

Capone leaves Ratty’s body against the car, rises and walks away. He does not cry, but the clenched twitching of his face and glassy eyes let us know that he is fighting the impulse. Moreover, when he stands, there is nothing but sky and three skinny palm trees behind him. We hear nothing but seagulls and the blowing breeze. Like Ivan’s final frames in the film *The Harder They Come*, Capone towers over these trees. He is still an impervious giant who is forced to kill his brother/child. But even in the face of the deepest wound, Capone is the ultimate Western hero. He walks towards the camera slowly, takes one look back and it looks as though he is going to break down. However, he turns back towards us with his head held a bit higher. The threat of tears seems to have passed and a tracking shot captures his slow deliberate steps towards the camera. It is at this moment that the soundtrack

kicks in with the heavy bass and music of the song “We Run Tings, Tings Nuh Run We” sung by Red Dragon. Eventually Capone’s upper body fills the right side of the frame and he walks off screen and supposedly into the sunset like any Hollywood desperado or mafia godfather would do – hardened but still standing. But let us not be deceived into thinking this is ideal. Although it is presented as heroic, this is not a healthy model of masculinity either. Capone attempts to retrieve Ratty’s moral center, but winds up standing alone in the end – the single gunslinger or “lone ranger” – enshrined in another code of silence.

Aside from these messages about masculinity, there is more to this scene. We must pay attention to the subtle message embedded in Capone’s having to kill Ratty. Just as the image of the violent black male in Jamaica extends the historical legacy of the brutish black male rapist from the U.S., the *intra*-violence portrayed in the film reinforces the stereotype of “black-on-black” violence. Patricia Hill Collins points out that the term “black-on-black” to describe violence actually originated in South Africa during the end of apartheid during a 1986 speech of then-president Botha (164). When the U.S. media picked up on the term, they erased all of the nuanced and complex reasons for the conflicts and painted everything as the result of “tribal” wars, suggesting “a fight among family members” (165). In Collins’s words, this reconstruction cast black Africa as “threatening, savage, and incapable of self-government and democracy” (165). By extension, using the phrase “black-on-

black” violence to describe what happens in inner cities also casts “Black urban neighborhoods as sites equally *incapable of controlling their children* and being self-governing” (165, emphasis added). Kelvin Quintyne describes Capone as “the most virile, invulnerable male character” as well as “the most powerful and dangerous male character” in the film (33). If this character, who single-handedly takes down enemies without backup or bullet-proof vest, cannot control his own metaphorical child without killing him, there are few things that will deter these children. Viewers outside of Jamaica are left with an unsettling sense of panic and a series of internal questions. What happens when there is no Capone to kill off these uncontrollable children? Who will ensure that they stay in their place, their home, their land in his absence? And what happens if they manage to escape their borders, cross boundaries and infiltrate elsewhere? What happens if these children *are* able to take that plane ticket and go to other territories? What will stop their invasion?

These questions are at the root of the immigrant hysteria that cyclically ebbs and flows across United States history in varying waves of intensity. From the nineteenth century anti-Irish and South/Eastern European sentiments, to the Chinese immigration ban in the 1880s and Southern/Eastern European immigrant quota restrictions set in 1924³ to the Japanese internment of the 1940s and recent scapegoating of Mexican and

³ By the Johnson-Reed Act (See Phillips).

Muslim immigrants (and anyone who *appears* to fit those identities), there is a racist undercurrent that North America is besieged by foreign Others. The circle of the targeted Other is generally drawn around communities of color and it is forever widening – particularly when there is a perceived threat (such as after the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks in the U.S. on September 11, 2001). As Edwidge Danticat says “We are indeed, all of us, suspects. However, as immigrants, we live with the double threat of being both possible victims *and* suspects” (xi, italics in original, as quoted in Nguyen).

However, even without the threat of violence, some Caribbean communities are stereotyped as having polluting/infectious bodies. For example, Haiti and Haitian people have a longstanding stigmatized association with poverty, disease and violent crisis. In the 1990s, the U.S. Center for Disease Control initially attributed the origins of HIV/AIDS to Haiti despite significant evidence that it was most likely introduced to the island during the height of sex tourism in the 1970s (Sheller 168). Mimi Sheller contends,

. . . it is likely that the high incidence of Haitian HIV was closely related to its popularity as a sex-tourist destination, yet the powerful discourse of ‘African primitivism’ and weird Haitian religious practices contributed to the stigamatisation [sic] of Haitians. The US state shores up its own borders by ignoring sex tourism and instead

policing the sexuality of fantasised [sic] dark Others in the Caribbean through a narrative of *transnational infection*. (169, emphasis added)

Violence, guns and drugs present a different kind of threat, but they are still attached to demonized Caribbean bodies. Shellers mentions how the movement of drugs and its associated violence into the U.S. and Europe, (especially during the crack cocaine epidemic of the 1980s), resulted in “the image of the Caribbean as a lawless zone of disorder in need of global policing, legitimising [sic] greater external control over the movements of its ‘infectious’ people” (170). Jamaica, in particular, is seen as a major lawless zone because of the influx of drug “posses” into U.S. and European cities after the U.S.-led “war on drugs.” According to Laurie Gunst (whose book will be analyzed in the next chapter),

The U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms has been tracking the posses since their mainland debut in the early 1980s, and it now [in 1995] reports that the gangs have killed forty-five hundred people in the United States since then. The gunmen began migrating to America just after the 1980 election in Jamaica; by that time Kingston’s top-ranking mercenaries had already begun trafficking in homegrown marijuana and transshipped cocaine. They soon branched out from Jamaica into the American market, and the money they made from the drug trade snapped the leash that had once bound them to their politician-patrons. (xiv – xv)

Gunst picks up on the image in public perception (both in the U.S. and Jamaica) of wild dogs let loose, on the run as public nuisance. This taps into the myth of the menacing black brute/myth of the black male rapist. She continues,

The [Jamaican political] party leaders, menaced by an outlaw underworld they could no longer control, turned the Jamaican police loose in the ghettos to execute their former paladins. This reign of terror sent posse men by the hundreds on the run to the United States. They brought with them a killer enthusiasm honed by years of warfare with one another and the police, and when they came onto America's mean streets, they were afraid of no one. (xv)

Violent black male criminals who are "afraid of no one" and threatening to penetrate U.S. borders are absolutely perceived as hazardous – this is consistent with immigrant as "invader" and "parasite" ideologies. The seeds of this invader image are planted by the end of *Third World Cop*, and later bloom in the 2002 film *Shottas*. Shifting heroic focus from police to perpetrator, the story of the hyper-violent black male brute is told through the frame of a coming-of-age tale.

Shottas

The term “shottas” is Jamaican patois for “gangster.” The figure of the gangster is attributed to U.S. popular culture images from both factual and fictional events that surround Italian American men. As Fred Gardaphé tells it,

During the late 1920s and early 1930s, the exploits of gangsters such as Al Capone, John Dillinger, “Baby Face” Nelson, and “Pretty Boy” Floyd became national news, fueled fictional accounts, and captured the popular imagination. These real-life gangsters rose above ordinary criminals by committing their crimes with bravado; they were all blatant transgressors of the boundaries between good and evil, right and wrong, and rich and poor. (3 – 4)

There is a sense of powerful individualism in this image. He commits crimes with *bravado* and *blatantly* transgressing boundaries – he is no ordinary criminal and he is both loved and hated by the community. But behind this colossal star power lies a certain everyday accessibility that is integral to why the U.S. public finds the image so alluring. Gardaphé continues:

As corporate capitalism promoted consumerism and widened the gap between rich and poor, Americans became infatuated with the gangster, *a man of humble origins* who affected stylish dress and fancy cars, *defying the boundaries separating social classes*. (4)

The gangster comes from simple beginnings. He is like Ivan and his Kingston friends on the ranch in the novel of *The Harder They Come* – simple country boys with big and bad aspirations to “live fast” and leave legendary stories. This desire crosses racial boundaries, so U.S. black filmmakers repackage this sentiment as a black hero when they start making movies. Gardaphé continues:

As African Americans began breaking down the social and economic barriers of earlier times, filmmakers began to exploit the black man in gangster films such as *Shaft* (1971) and *Black Caesar* (1973). The black gangster then became a kind of revolutionary figure as African Americans began making their own films and music. (5)

Overall, the gangster’s story is rooted in an underdog story. To start from humble beginnings and later defy class boundaries is powerful mythology that forms the bedrock of many immigrant dreams (those with and without criminal intent). Although he is depicted with varying levels of character depth, the overall image of the gangster stands for “cultural perceptions of true manhood” (5). As a result, this iconic figure, (much like the cowboy figure), is exported worldwide and constantly re-imagined in various narratives. When he is configured in the U.S. “blaxploitation” film era of the 1970s in the aforementioned movies like *Shaft*, I would imagine that it has a powerful effect when exported to the black male immigrant viewer – to look at oneself on screen as an indestructible violent black male hero. But again,

we know that this construction merely reinforces the brutish stereotype of violent black masculinity. It helps to instill the idea that young black men primarily want to make it “by de hook or by de crook” as Ratty says.

Wanted

Shottas tells the story of Wayne Smith and Errol “Biggs” Williams, two black Jamaican boys growing up in the Waterhouse community of Kingston Jamaica. The film uses a technique similar to that in *Third World Cop*’s opening sequence, because we get snippets of an establishing scene spliced in between the opening credits. It is a group assassin’s ambush taking place in the adult Biggs’s Miami home. Just like *Third World Cop* lets us immediately know that we are dealing with a hyper-masculine black body, *Shottas* immediately frames the hero as site of physical strength, fierce aggression and powerful sexuality. Biggs is laughing and enjoying the company of Wayne and Max who have stopped by his house on a lazy morning. Biggs is still in his bathrobe after having just had sex in the shower with his girlfriend, who is relaxing on the living room couch reading *Vogue* magazine. However, when the shots begin to fire inside his home, Biggs swiftly reaches into his robe to pull out his guns. The shot freezes, turns into a grainy black and white image (similar to an old newspaper photo), then zooms in a little closer on the frozen image. We are left staring at this scowling, bearded black man with

locs, pulling a gun out of his silky bathrobe (see Figure 4). This is an intentional gesture of looking. We do not find out what happens in this particular scene until later, but jumping ahead in the narrative to include it as part of the introductory segment confirms the racist inevitability playing out in the fearful mind that the uncontrollable immigrant children are indeed running wild in U.S. lands.

A Boy Like Me . . .

When the narrative jumps back to its chronological beginning, it is 1978 and we are in Waterhouse, Jamaica. A group of boys is playing what looks like “cops and robbers” at night in an alley. One small boy is crouched peeping around a long rusty zinc fence with a wooden gun on the left of the screen, while five grown men stand talking and smoking in the background shadows. A group of six taller boys run into the frame from the right and up behind the first boy. They wield wooden guns, all pointing at the first boy, and yell “pow, pow, pow!” The first boy drops to the dusty ground in fake death and the group runs towards us and off screen, laughing and announcing that “the policeman is dead!”⁴ It is interesting that the first boy is supposed to be a police officer because he is wearing a red t-shirt and blue shorts while all of the other boys have on some version of dingy white or

⁴ The film audio only captures the word “dead” amidst the laughter, but the subtitles add the words “the policeman.”

black shirt or tank top. If we remember from Capone's nightstand picture in *Third World Cop*, the primary colors in the Jamaican police officer uniform are red and blue. After the boys run off, our police officer still lies in the dirt and a different boy runs back on screen announcing to someone that we cannot see that "Biggs dem shot Jakes." He goes over to shake his friend and ask "Jakes yuh dead?" and as he is lamenting, yet another boy comes on screen from the right. This boy has a very long wooden gun and he steps up behind the mourner and puts the barrel against the back of his head. Both boys stop moving for at least three seconds, holding the pose of shooter and victim, until the shooter pulls his trigger with an emphatic verbal bullet. The victim dramatically drops on top of the "officer" that he was just shaking. It sounds like the shooter says "bu'n!" (as in "burn"). This would be a consistent gesture since he stares at his fallen victim for a moment and shouts, "Informa dead!" (as in the snitch/informer is dead). Recall that Ratty (from *Third World Cop*) would rather die than be known as an informer so this make-believe character can have no other fate. The shooter then turns and runs off screen towards us yelling "Wait for me! Me shot the informa!" We later find out that this is Wayne.

This familiar gun battle game plays out in most boys' coming-of-age stories. Remember that Skin has a fascination with guns in the novel *For Nothing at All* and Perry Henzell pairs the shoot-out scene from *Django* with the rapt faces of young boys watching the movie screen in the film *The Harder*

They Come. There is even a short clip of boys with a cap-gun and cardboard machine guns quickly running past Capone during one of his attempts to catch Ratty in *Third World Cop*. It is a brief moment, but significant nonetheless because boys and toy guns is clearly a common trope. However, what is perhaps more noticeable in this scene is the position of adults. The five men in the background do not intervene, question, re-direct or anything. Since there is nothing out of place in their minds, nothing deserves comment or focus. They continue to talk and smoke amongst themselves in tacit approval of the boys pretending to kill the police as well as one another. But because of the history of police brutality in Kingston communities and the particular revulsion that many Jamaican men hold for so-called informers, anyone killing these characters might be seen as doing a community service.

The scene dissolves into a football game in the same alley between some of the taller boys in the laughing group (Biggs being one of them). A rickety car sputters its way through the middle of their game and parks in the alley shadows. A sweaty young man in a button-down shirt that hangs over his jeans gets out of the driver's seat nervously looking around (leaving another man in the passenger seat). Biggs and Wayne go over to greet him: "What a gwyan Sando." Still looking around and anxiously shifting his weight from side-to-side, Sando begins to pull a gun out of his waistband. Biggs immediately notices and asks, "What dat gun for?" Sando deflects his question with a question about whether they went to school today. Wayne

says they will go to school tomorrow and Sando says, "Make sure, make sure." But Biggs counters with the proclamation that he does not need school because he is going to be just like Sando. At this moment, the passenger in the car pipes up and reminds Sando to stop wasting time with the kids and to go do what they came to do. Sando moves off screen while Biggs and Wayne stand looking in the direction of his exit. We hear two gunshots followed by a woman's shrill screams and Sando comes back on screen and gets into the car. Biggs and Wayne have moved to the background but no one in the area is running. Although some people look concerned, the other boys are still there and at least three of the older men in the smoking crew in the background basically remain in their positions. Sando tries to start the car, but it too is dead. He and his partner get out and run off the screen by the zinc fencing where the "police" and "informa" were shot in the children's earlier game. The scene ends with a close-up of Biggs's profile staring in their direction with his mouth hanging open, while the woman's off-screen screams for "somebody" go unanswered by all.

This is a childhood clearly punctuated by violence and both Biggs and Wayne look up to *shottas* such as Sando because he represents a powerful masculinity that these young boys want to emulate. Gun violence is the way they see to enact "real" manhood and gain power, and Biggs is clear that he does not need school to get it. He enacts symbolic performances in their games, but he is much more interested in the real thing. He is still a boy but

anxious to become a man in the way that he sees it defined around him. As Imani Tafari-Ama says, “The power that the *Shotters* enjoy brings not only material and political rewards, but most crucially, the psychosocial benefits of person/man/hood” (234, italics in original). If being a *shotta* and *taking* life is the vehicle that paradoxically *bestows life/meaning/personhood* on the *shotta*, we must think about the material conditions that surround that life. The government neglect and limited opportunity for some Kingston communities that Ratty referenced in *Third World Cop* is a very real situation for far too many people. In her research in Southside, Kingston, Tafari-Ama finds that “it is so hard to achieve anything in the ghetto because of the paucity of available options and choices and the odds that are effectively arrayed against even the strongest survivor, that many so-called providers have no recourse but to become involved in criminal activities” (236). But even without the official obligation of being a provider as father, spouse or boyfriend, many youth recognize the connection between money and masculinity. This is echoed by Gary Barker’s findings from his research in Jamaica, Brazil, Columbia and Africa:

. . . social exclusion psychologically wounds young men in gender-specific ways. The chief mandate of manhood is to earn income, to work, to become financially dependent and to support others, if possible. This income is prerequisite for attracting young women and being able to form a stable relationship or start a family. To be an out-

of-work young man is *not* to be a man, it is to be a boy, to lack status. Indeed, the term 'boy' has historically been hurled as an insult to African male slaves and their male descendants. It is a term that in effect strips them of their manhood, and reminds them of their lack of power in the system. For many young men, to be socially excluded *and* to be denied the title of manhood is injustice squared. (57 – 58, italics in original)

Therefore, becoming a *shotta* is often an attempt to resist social exclusion and gain identity, respect and power. Two Southside men from Tafari-Ama's interviews confirm how this plays out in their neighborhood:

For a lot of the *Shotters*, it is *just a proving thing*. A man is proving that he can do this, because he has some heavier arms. Some men gain respect because they had a strong voice. But without *firepower*, *nobody recognizes them*. *That is how a lot of them get recognition around here*. . . . Luddy, Ladd Lane (247, italics in original)

The *Shotters* are shooting each other for power. They want power to run the community and power to just set certain things between themselves and their friends. The youths are not saying anything conscious, they are only preaching violence. . . . they just want to know that they have a gun in their hands. That is power for them, to do anything that they feel like doing. As long as you have a gun, it is as if

you have the whole world in your hands. Nobody can talk to you then
and you can do anything that you feel like doing. . . . Bobby,
Higolborn Street (247, italics in original)

Sando represents their intoxicating vision of the tough independence and unquestioned respect that is derived from fear and cruelty. However, we know that mimicking this model of mythic masculinity comes at a cost to the victims of violence, as well as to the perpetrator (think back to Ivan). However because Sando's shooting did not cause any major concern or panic, it seems like it is fairly unremarkable. They are even able to run away without anyone trying to stop them. Like the adults' reaction to the boys' mock shooting, this is something that apparently happens regularly and also affects bystanders. Tafari-Ama discusses that bystanders benefit from this patriarchal system that pairs violence with masculinity: "even men who are not directly involved in explicit practices of patriarchy or violence, may nevertheless benefit from the prevailing system and therefore offer tacit support to the normative gender order by their uncritical silence or strategic complicity" (234). But they also lose. This type of desensitization is damaging. We see this uncritical silence in the group of adult men in the background. However, their non-action also raises the other very real issue that many community members experiencing this kind of violence are bystanders out of fear. Sometimes people do not intervene because it is simply dangerous to do

so. Tafari-Ama's informant Bobby says "These youth nowadays though, you can't talk to them. *All you have to do is just, see and blind, hear and deaf and just go through because what is happening will not stop and it can't be changed*" (247, italics in original). This fatalistic view of the future grows out of a culture of fear. Yet it is important for us to remember that this fear is transferred to the physical bodies of the young black men themselves and associated with their natural way of being – this is just how they are. And this transference is easy to believe when exported in the images found in *Shottas*.

After Sando's shooting, the scene cuts to Biggs and Wayne sitting on a stoop one day. Wayne is playing with marbles or stones, while Biggs watches a delivery man unload beverages from his truck parked across from them. Biggs wonders aloud how much money the driver might be carrying and suggests to Wayne that they go find out. After asking if he needs any help, Biggs engages the driver in a conversation about how much money he makes in a day. The driver is impressed with his willingness to help out with "big man's work" and reassures Biggs that he will soon make a lot of money too. Biggs still wants to know what a typical day's earnings are, to settle the bet he has with his friend that the figure is less than the \$5000 Wayne allegedly guessed. The driver falls for the bait and says they are both wrong and that he typically makes \$100,000 in a day. As he gets into his truck to leave, they climb up the side of the truck and look into his passenger window. This is an interior shot and their faces are tightly framed by the big truck window,

making them appear defenseless as they peer into the truck cabin with this grown man behind the wheel. Biggs says that he must carry a gun to protect all that money and the driver replies that he does not need a gun because he is afraid of “nuttin and no one.” The truck drives off and Biggs and Wayne go sit back on the stoop and start playing marbles again. Without the truck dwarfing them in the frame, they seem much more in control of their surroundings in this close medium shot. Biggs is wearing a Winnie the Pooh t-shirt that has a profile of Pooh eating honey from a jar and looking up at a star. However, when Biggs first stands we see that a square of the shirt is cut out where Pooh’s stomach would be, and Biggs’s chubby stomach pokes through instead. This alteration gives us the feeling that Biggs is a good-natured, comedic innocent who is able to laugh at his own flaws. He is a tall and chubby child (hence the name Biggs) while Wayne is slim, smaller and possibly younger. Yet Biggs is not the subject of the teasing or ridicule that one might suspect a chubby character would face from cruel kids. More importantly, Wayne looks up to him like an older brother and clearly follows his lead, having said nothing the entire time Biggs engaged the truck driver in conversation.

As they sit, Biggs says they “need a tool [gun]” - a sharp contrast to their game of marbles. And although Wayne replies that that takes a lot of money, he remembers that he knows where one is hidden. The next morning Wayne goes to Rasta Neville’s home under the pretense of visiting his son,

but on his way out he secretly takes the gun, shoving it into the waist of his huge shorts like he has seen done before. As he lifts his shirt, his tiny prepubescent torso stands in sharp contrast to the old black gun that he tucks against it. He goes to Biggs's house to show him and later the two sit waiting along the side of the road. While waiting, Wayne asks Biggs why his mother sent him back to Jamaica to which Biggs replies, "she say me bad." But then Biggs adds, "Wayne, you don' think me bad do you?" Wayne responds, "Nah man. You cool." Again, this semi-close up shot is framed tightly so that the two of them sit side-by-side pictured from the chest up – they have on the same clothes as the day before and Biggs's Pooh shirt looks whole, giving him a cherubic look. This is underscored by the vulnerable expression that creeps across Biggs's face when he asks Wayne whether or not he thinks he is really bad, (for if his mother says he is, then there must be some truth). The surrounding street walls dwarf them and crude blue graffiti is scrawled on the wall just over Biggs's shoulder. It says "Kids Kru," as if a menacing foreshadow that in these mean Kingston streets, even the kids form crews/gangs.

When the same truck driver comes down the road, makes a delivery and drives off, they hop up and run after the truck. Wayne fakes a fall in the truck's path and the driver stops, gets out and rushes to his aid. Biggs comes from behind the truck, points the stolen gun at him while demanding "the money." Wayne's knee is suddenly healed and he gets up from the road to

dig a bundle of bills out of the man's pockets. Holding the gun in a sideways aim like many African American movie gangsters do, Biggs asks where the rest is hidden. When the driver hesitates, Biggs shoots him in the leg. The driver falls, pleading for his life and tells them that it is under the seat. Wayne climbs into the truck while Biggs keeps the gun pointed at the man. When Wayne comes out of the truck with a white bag added to the first bundle, he and Biggs run off leaving the driver on the side of the road.

Suddenly Biggs's Pooh shirt is no longer cute during this hold-up and the viewer is left thinking that maybe his mother was right. He *is* bad. He could have shot next to the driver, or into the air or not have thought of the whole scheme in the first place. But we must believe that these are uncontrollable children and uncontrollable children are nothing but trouble. When they split the money later that evening by candlelight in what looks like Biggs's room, (and in different clothes), Biggs asks Wayne what he is going to do with his half of the money. Wayne is not sure but thinks he will give it to his mother. Biggs says that he is going to give some of his money to Sando, who has "visa connections," so that he can get back to America. Wayne likes the sound of this new plan, and says he will do that too. Biggs insists that his aunt will now *have* to send him back to his mother in Miami because "*A boy like me [must] go back ah foreign*" (emphasis added). It seems as though Biggs has also internalized his mother's message since the implication is that "a boy like [him]" has only limited opportunity to get into

trouble in Jamaica (hence why his mother sent him), whereas “back ah foreign,” the possibilities seem endless. Wayne admits that he wants to go “ah foreign” too and Biggs says he will ask his mother if he can stay with them. There is no mention of Biggs’s (or Wayne’s) father, so we assume that his mother’s inability to control a rambunctious boy is part of her motivation to send Biggs back to Jamaica. However, the narrative of uncontrollability insists that young black brutes simply grow into adult black brutes. Nothing can derail that supposed course of action, although we have to take note that Biggs makes all of Wayne’s decisions for him. Wayne’s impulse to give his portion of the money to his mother and be content to stay in Jamaica seems like the right thing to do in an already wrong situation. This leaves viewers with the impression that there is small window of opportunity for rehabilitation/redemption. But the dominant model of masculinity wins out and the stereotypical, self-serving choice takes precedence. Therefore, their coming-of-age transitions from shooting wooden guns and marbles, to shooting a real gun at a real person for money. Biggs said he wanted to be just like Sando, and his prophecy starts to come true. He is on his way back “ah foreign” – the contagion/disdained Other now exported.

Aliens, Invaders and Parasites

The very next scene is a long shot of passengers walking through an airport. A voice over a loudspeaker announces, "Flight 33 from Miami has just arrived." The flash of "20 years later" lets us know that the man now in the center of our screen, walking in between two other men with white shirts and long ties, is an adult Biggs. He has locs that are pulled back, a full beard and new swagger to his step – all very different from the child we last saw. He has been deported back to Jamaica and the men escorting him are officers, who sit him down in an Inspector's office. When the Inspector goes through the materials of the file that the officers leave with him, he calls Biggs's full name (Errol Williams) and asks where he is from. Biggs sits in stony silence flipping through a small green book. When the Inspector stares and repeats the question, Biggs puts his book into a breast pocket and answers, "America." The Inspector then asks, "Bwoy, which part a Jamaica yuh born?" Reluctantly, Biggs answers "Kingston Public Hospital." Although we do not know how old Biggs is when he leaves Jamaica, he has clearly spent more of his life in America than in Jamaica. This moment mirrors the experience of many "returnees" who leave the island as young children, are socialized in the U.S. for many years and then forcibly returned as adults to a strange home where they no longer have connections. "You's a wise ass," the Inspector challenges back and runs down the litany of typical offences that some deportees commit in "ah foreign" and bring back "home" to "mash up

de island." He lets Biggs know, "as you slip, I'll be inna your rass" and orders him fingerprinted, photographed and released with an envelope and small plastic bag of belongings that Biggs immediately throws in the trash as he walks out of the airport.

When he gets outside, their childhood whistle reunites the strangers and they marvel at how much they have changed. Wayne picks him up in a Mercedes Benz with a friend named Mad Max and takes him to his huge mansion on a hill, with a driveway full of luxury cars. Later that evening, the house is full of women, more men, music, alcohol and marijuana – all seemingly in celebration of Biggs's return. Wayne and Biggs separate themselves from the rest of the crowd and Wayne lets Biggs know that he is welcome to whatever he has. All that he wants in return, is for Biggs to show him "how the game run" since he already "locked down Miami." Wayne gestures toward the crew of men lounging around the house and says they would do anything for them because they are "hungry – especially Max." He stresses to Biggs that he has to help him "feed these dogs" because "if the dogs don't eat food, they'll turn around and eat our food." Biggs says he does not know Jamaica or its people anymore, but more importantly, that he had "millions" before going to prison. He says emphatically, "I lived the best life and I want it back, but little Jamaica cyan do dat for me!" Wayne explains how he has all the local business owners paying him a "little something" every month for protection because he and his crew are "more effective than

the police.” Biggs challenges that it “sound like extortion” but Wayne insists that it is nothing but “capitalism” and that they can live a good life. Then Wayne adds a different motivation that makes it sound as though he does not have a choice: “They fling we outta America you know. So we’re here now. What we gon do? Lay down and make people call we wutless deportee bwoy?! If anyone calls me that I’ll empty my gun in his face!” He impresses upon Biggs that he came down to Jamaica like him “with nothing” and realized that he “had to step up de game.” So he tells Biggs, “tek American outta your mind [because] right now we have everyting down here. All de politicians we have in our pocket.” Biggs simply nods in silent acceptance.

Here we find out that Wayne *did* manage to get to the U.S. too. However, he was deported four years prior to Biggs, and in those four years back on the island, he turns himself into a major ruthless *shotta* of the area. When Biggs accompanies him, Max and Wayne’s younger brother Blacka to a car dealership, Biggs finds out just how ruthless Wayne has become. The Chinese owner of the dealership, Mr. Chin, tells Wayne that he needs a week to get him his money. But Wayne says he is not keeping up his end of the bargain and flippantly orders Max to kill him. Max immediately shoots him, then Blacka and Max stand over Mr. Chin’s fallen body and shoot seven more times. When they are all back in Wayne’s truck, a stunned Biggs asks from the back seat, “*This* is how y’all living?” with a note of questioning disapproval. In an effort to push the stigma of being a “wutless deportee

bwoy” far far away from him, Wayne becomes the brutish beast most feared in racist imaginations. He learns from childhood that “the biggest gun gives you the most power” as one of the Southside residents say, and he strives to construct the benefits of “person/man/hood” that Tafari-Ama discusses.

However, what makes his pursuit a little different from the usual constructions of hegemonic masculinity, is that he is battling against the stigma of being deported. Both Wayne and Biggs now have twice as much to prove – on the one hand, they must show that they meet the hegemonic definitions of what a “real” man is. But on the other more challenging hand, they must also show that they are not the failures that being a deportee implies. *The New York Times* reporter Marc Lacey describes the stigma in an online article about criminals deported to Jamaica: “. . . deportees are regarded as the lowest of the low in Jamaica. Not only are most of them ex-convicts, but they also have another serious strike against them: blowing their chance to make it overseas . . . they find politicians and police officers blaming them for the island’s spiraling crime, and neighbors and even relatives turning their backs on them” (1). However, while all deportees are not “ex-convicts”/criminals, all deportees are criminalized. This subtle distinction makes the stigmatizing label all the more painful for some citizens who have been deported for minor “criminal” misdemeanors⁵. But for the

⁵ In 1996 U.S. President Clinton signed and Congress passed what Bernard Headley calls “the most onerous piece of immigration legislation in recent American history, ‘The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act’. The act expanded the scope of crimes considered aggravated felonies, which are the grounds for deportation. . . . Under the

violent returnee, it makes “proving” their masculinity all the more urgent. Living with the twin strikes of being seen as a failed man and a failed citizen challenges the very foundation of what a man is supposed to be. Jamaican men are socialized to be tough, aloof, in control of their emotions, financial providers, imminent protectors, actively heterosexual and ruggedly individualistic, all while needing the help of no one but themselves – these are all desirable traits. The intersection of deportation and masculinity reinforces the notion of *undesirability*, (which is already attached to the invasive black body in the U.S.). However, it heightens the level of undesirability in Jamaica. Therefore, by adding this element to Biggs and Wayne’s stories, the film attempts to convince us that violence is the best way to retrieve a lost sense of manhood or create a sense of manhood in the first place. Of course this reinforces the stigma of the savage black brute. Yet viewers are nevertheless seduced into feeling that Biggs is the ultimate hero, the underdog gangster that we both love and hate, fear and admire. Similar to the way we are invested in Ivan’s *cow-bwoy* version of masculinity by that film’s end, Biggs also becomes the violent *shotta* hero that we root for until the last reel/shot (ballistic and filmic) of this film. Both characters leave home, unable to return without first proving that they are “real” men.

act, even unpaid traffic fines are grounds for expulsion. The statutes apply retroactively to all non-citizens who ever committed a crime, even those that occurred in a distant past. They also apply to crimes for which . . . a court had not imposed a prison sentence.” (1)

Who let the dogs out?

After Wayne orders Mr. Chin's murder, the police surround Blacka and Max while they are out riding motorcycles one afternoon. Both men have women on their back seats, arms clinging around their waists as they stop at a traffic light. When the police cars swarm, Max yells "pussyhole dead!" and his woman turns and shoots at the officers. She is shot (essentially becoming a human shield for Max) and Blacka and his woman are shot. When Max's woman falls off of his motorcycle dead, he does a wheely and dramatically speeds off down the street to freedom unharmed. Here, one of the perpetrators and both of the bystanders are damaged, and women's bodies once again become an odd springboard for proving dominant masculinity. Max calls the house and tells John John, who breaks the news of Blacka's death to Wayne and Biggs who are playing chess on the balcony. Wayne calls his MP (Minister of Parliament) who asks Wayne to come talk to him in the office. White MP Patrick Anderson explains to Wayne (and Biggs) that because the Chinese community knew who killed their colleague he could not control the police reaction: "Laing is an officer of the law and if your boys won't listen, there's very little I can do." Wayne insists that Officer Laing did not have to kill Blacka, but Mr. Anderson argues that his brother "was like a mad dog running wild." With pending elections, Mr. Anderson "can't afford unnecessary wrongs in [his] constituency" and offers Wayne and his friends visas to disappear for a while. However, after Wayne decides that he is not

leaving the island because “things are good for [him] right now,” Mr. Anderson later calls Officer Laing with the instructions to get rid of their common problem. Biggs, Wayne and Max survive the late-night shoot-out (although Wayne is shot in the shoulder and John John dies) and Wayne finds out that Mr. Anderson is the person responsible for the ambush in his Waterhouse community. While regrouping in a hotel room with Wayne and Max, Biggs explains that true *shottas* “don’t rob poor and nine to five people.” He insists that they need to “go a Miami [and] rob drug dealers” instead, or end up dead. So Wayne calls Mr. Anderson’s back to take his visa deal.

Their meeting scene begins with an interior shot of Mr. Anderson sitting in the driver’s seat of a white truck looking around. Wayne and Biggs pull up next to him in their truck. Biggs is driving and Wayne is in the passenger seat that is right next to Mr. Anderson’s window. A quick cut reveals that Max is in the back seat of their truck holding a long knife to Mr. Anderson’s receptionist’s neck. She is wide-eyed and trembling. Mr. Anderson passes the envelope through his open window to Wayne, who hands the information to Biggs to look over. “Look legit?” Wayne asks, still needing Biggs’s “big brother’s” authorization. When Biggs nods his approval, Wayne whips out a gun and immediately fires at Mr. Anderson, with Biggs joining in over his shoulder. Mr. Anderson’s white button-down business shirt is riddled with bright red bullet holes and surprised agony stretches across his face. He slumps to the side of his steering wheel in slow motion,

bleeding to his certain death, and as they drive off, Wayne yells “That’s for my little brother.”

This is the first time that we see Mr. Anderson outside of the office. All previous shots of him have been in his small dimly lit office with the Venetian blinds closed against the glare of the sun. However, his closed blinds also give us the feeling that he is not just keeping air conditioning in, but rather that he keeps people out – he is comfortably separate from his constituency, insulated in the cool blue light of privilege and power. The fact that Mr. Anderson is murdered the first and only time that we see him outside the dim bluish light of his office, only underscores the threatening image of the menacing black brute waiting to pounce on white innocent victims as soon as they step out from the safety of their homes. As Mr. Anderson said about Wayne’s brother Blacka: “he was like a mad dog running wild,” so since they are related, Wayne must be a mad dog too. As if in affirmation of this backhanded connection, Wayne tells Max to “fling out that gyal” and Max shoves the black female receptionist out of the truck. She bounces off the back of another parked truck and falls to the ground. As they speed off, she is whimpering and crawling on the pavement in shock and we never see her (or Jamaica) again. The next shot is a low-angled view of a large billboard-sized sign of the word “Miami” as a plane flies overhead. The mad dogs are loose and they are invading “our” borders.

Wayne, Biggs and Max drive up to a grassy alley behind houses in between loitering black and Latino men. One black man comes over and asks that they want and Biggs asks who is running the spot. Shortly afterwards, fellow Jamaican Gussy makes his way out and greets them with surprise: "The gangsters are back!" Gussy gets into the back seat with questions about why they are back there and Biggs lets him know that they have come "to take this bitch over," and in Wayne's words, "we're here to claim back what rightfully our own." Gussy explains that Teddy Bruck Shot is the new big man in town and they might have a hard time since "Teddy holds down the weight in this town." He tells them where they can find him and before they leave, Wayne reminds him "that you need to give us a little something Gussy." Gussy simply responds, "I know how it goes shotta" and reaches into his pocket. Max, who has been sitting in the back seat silent this whole time, draws his gun and loops Gussy's his left arm around Gussy's head. Gussy asks, "Yo Biggs, who's this breddah?" and Biggs calls off Max like the hungry dog we were told that he was back in Wayne's house: "Max Max, he's cool." Max releases him, Gussy passes his shotta tax, and they drive off to find Teddy eating and plotting cocaine drops with his crew of followers in their usual restaurant.

When Biggs enters the restaurant, Teddy and his crew give him a standing ovation: "Look who the fuck is back. The king of Miami. At least him once was. What you say big man?" When Teddy goes to shake Biggs's

hand, Biggs snatches Teddy around in a choke hold and puts a gun to his temple in a tight close-up. Wayne and Max rush in and put everyone else against the wall. Biggs explains that he wants “a piece of everything.” Teddy shakingly asks, “everything?” Biggs repeats, “every bloodclaat ting. Mean if you sell a “kil” a coke, halfa mine. If you sell a bloodclaat nickel bag o’ weed, pussyhole, same ting.” Teddy claims that he is trying to “escort” him and Biggs corrects him: “It’s *extort* and you’s a fucking drug dealer, what de fuck you tell me ‘bout extortion, eh?” Teddy reluctantly agrees, Biggs lets him go, Wayne snatches a diamond ring off Teddy’s finger and they back out with guns drawn. And thus begins their reign of terror.

Shots cut back and forth between their various “jobs” of taking money and killing people. In one brief shot Biggs and Wayne are arrested in separate places by police, but the next shot shows them picking up rolls of money from their latest victim, while Max is somewhere else smoking a cigarette that is in the fingers of a severed arm! After putting the mangled remains in the dumpster, Max paints the number thirty-three in blood on its side. And after another heist of marijuana and a suitcase of cash, Biggs and Wayne leave their victim duct-taped to a chair. Max is supposed to follow, but instead he sees a knife displayed on the wall and stands behind the chair to cut the man’s throat as he trembles and vacantly stares into the distance. The shot turns distorted and fuzzy as double images of his face swirl in the frame. He grabs the cigarette behind his ear with his bloody hand and begins smoking

(like after sex). He trembles and laughs and the focus blurs into distortion again. He smears the number thirty-four on the wall in blood, and laughs. But he suddenly turns back to the wall and quickly adds a number one in *front* of the thirty-four. Max's body count is now 134 and we are clearly supposed to see him as crazy. He is primarily silent and generally around when Biggs and Max during the scenes of violence. When Biggs and Max are at the mall or driving around town, Max is noticeably absent as though left home like the family pet. His lust for grisly brutality and killing epitomizes the nightmare of the mad dogs running wild within U.S. borders and even when he is shot in the ambush near the end of the film, Max is still able to kill his assailant as well as a few others in spite of his life threatening wounds. Biggs drops him at a hospital, pretending he found him on the road as

Conversely, Wayne is portrayed as violent yet stubborn. Like Ratty, he does not want to hear Biggs's later advice that they take it easy for a while because they have enough money to last for a while. Biggs wants he and Max to come with him and his girlfriend to Los Angeles for a small vacation. Biggs wants to buy a house there and slow down, but Wayne says he is going to stay. Max says that "nutten no matta to me" so Wayne convinces him not to go either. But before any of these plans can be put into place, Teddy's men ambush the house and we are taken back to the frozen scene that opens the film. When the bullets stop flying, Max is shot but holding on, his girlfriend is shot and dies, and Wayne is shot and dies. Like Ratty, the hard-headed

younger brother, the uncontrollable child, has to die. And although Biggs was just in a loving mood having had sex with his girlfriend who he wants to move with to L.A., after she is shot, we see no more of her. Her final frame is a close-up of her exposed breast and chest wound as she lies against their couch bleeding. When Biggs comes out from hiding behind the couch, he presumably walks right past her and goes and grabs Wayne. While Capone holds back his tears, Biggs lets his flow, holding his friend's head on his lap while flashing back through memories. He chokes out, "For life me breddah, for life" while his girlfriend lies unmourned in blood supposedly not far away.

Biggs is portrayed as a *shotta* with a conscience. He is a social bandit of sorts, who is unwilling to steal from poor and nine-to-five people. Instead he gets his money from drug dealers, as though it is somehow more honest that way. The dealers are made out to be the ones poisoning communities with their way of life and we never see *him* dealing drugs. He is the one who insightfully tells Wayne that it is "monsters we ah create" when he first sees that Blacka owns a gun like his older brother Wayne when they were in Jamaica. He disapproves of Mr. Chin's murder and in the end thinks they all need to "ease off a de takin' thing right now." He also appears to be loyal to just one woman who he lives with and buys lavish presents (because this is her primary interest). In this way, the filmmakers try to make Biggs a legitimate businessman.

He jokes with Wayne that their exploits are like “one more hard day inna de office,” while Wayne says things like “another working day, another day on the job.” Additionally, they always justify their actions with the idea that they are simply providing food for their family. Wayne tells Mr. Anderson that Officer Laing (who killed his brother) always wants to “box food outta our mouth” and Biggs later answers the rhetorical question of “what’s up?” from Richie, (one of Teddy’s men), with the answer that they are simply “tryin’ to eat.” When Richie laughs back, “Looks like you eatin’ to me!” (because he and Wayne have just gotten out of a convertible Porsche), Biggs smiles and says, “small ting.” Incidentally, every time we see Biggs and Wayne driving around, they are in a different luxury vehicle, from sedans to trucks. It is so striking that even Teddy jokes with them when pulling up alongside their Ranger Rover truck one evening. He says, “Wha’ ya say big man? Like yuh own car dealership.” Biggs and Wayne are definitely living the glamorous life and it is held out as a legitimate career path for young boys to follow. The younger Biggs already knew that he did not need school to live the life that would be respected by his male and female peers. Going to school and staying out of trouble cannot compete with this sexy image of what “real” men are supposed to be. This leaves fewer models for positive masculine gender identity formation – particularly when put up against the serious socioeconomic challenges so many families face in low-income Jamaican communities. In the face of limited employment opportunities and

government neglect of the community, becoming a shotta seems like the easiest choice. Sammo, one of Tafari-Ama's informants, explains why it is such an attractive option for Southside residents:

When you are a shotter, you get everything free. You can go out at the Arcade [downtown Kingston marketplace where imported goods are sold] and say I am a shotter from Southside and you get what you are to get. If you want a pair of sneakers, you get your sneakers. Here they respect you in the ways how they deal with you. They say "yes Sir" even though you are a little youth. It's just *mostly about respect*. . . . If you are a big time shotter, you run business places. *You are the main man*. (240, emphasis added)

Like Wesley said in the novel *For Nothing At All*, the rewards seem to consistently go to the young men who do *not* follow the rules:

. . . I believed that if I stayed out of trouble, one day I would make it. One day, I would be among important people shaking hands, drinking wine, paying homage, being paid homage to. And those who ignored school would have seen me out there as an example of what they could have been had they followed the rules, behaved themselves and obeyed the law.

But now *they* were the ones being feted. They were the ones who were having their way, driving the fancy cars and getting the

contracts, whose shoes were worth six months of my wages. (154 – 155)

Men like Floyd in *Third World Cop* follow the rules – call for back-up, wear your bullet-proof vest, put your gun on your lap in the “bad” part of town – but men like Floyd are not seen as “real” men, let alone viable role models. Every young man wants the attention and respect that is given to Biggs and Wayne from men and women alike. Although internally individual men might not approve of the methods to gain this respect (which is really the ability to induce fear), they definitely want the external trappings of being “the main man.” They want other men to look up to them and they want women to desire them. The hegemonic script says that “main” men draw all the women – they are the desirable body. In the film, the scene right after Biggs’s “small ting” Porsche, burns this idea of desirability into the brain of audience members – particularly young viewers.

The Main Man

When we first meet Biggs’s girlfriend, he and Wayne pull up outside of her apartment for a surprise visit. It is a long tracking shot and a car is driving towards the camera. When it stops by the curb, an extreme close-up of a Mercedes Benz grill and headlights fill the frame and Biggs makes a call on his cell phone. It seems as though they are still getting to know one

another since his conversation begins with “is this Raquel?” When she seemingly asks him to identify himself, he says, “C’mon man, how many niggahs you got callin’ you? This Biggs, I’m outside.” When he hangs up, he mutters “bitches” to Wayne who replies, “Woman. Cyan live wid dem, cyan live widdout dem.” The image cuts to a slow-motion shot of Raquel coming out of her door in turquoise shorts, and a tight, striped low-cut halter that reveals ample cleavage and a sliver of belly, waist and navel. They watch her walking towards them and Wayne lets Biggs know, “Dat one dere look like a winna tho’ dog” as he offers his fist to Biggs for a brotherly “pound.” Her long brown hair bounces around her shoulders as she glides over to the passenger side of the car with a big smile. She leans over to greet them with overflowing breasts that are eye-level to Wayne in the passenger seat. She grins and wriggles, pulls at her halter and constantly pushes her hair back behind her ears. After introducing her to Wayne, Biggs asks if she is going to accompany him to the club later that night and insists that she come now. When she protests that she is not even dressed, Biggs chides her: “You’re always worried ‘bout the wrong things. We goin’ to the mall,” at which point a huge smile spreads across her face.

The scene shifts to Biggs and Wayne coming in through the glass door of Pampaloni, an upscale Italian boutique that sells “silverware, jewellery [sic] and eyeware.” The female salesperson greets them and Wayne lets her know that she is gorgeous and that he wants to marry her. “Wha’ yuh say? You

wanna get married to me?" She merely laughs and goes to help Biggs see the watch that he is pointing to – the "diamond encrusted" Presidential Rolex. Wayne asks to see the Platinum Cartier and Biggs lets her know that he will "tek de two o' dem." She pauses and says, "Don't you want to know the prices?" to which Biggs responds, "Baby if I gotta ask the prices that means I can't afford it." He and Wayne chuckle and give each other pounds and he says, "I got cash." She is apologetic and lets them know, "I didn't mean any harm at all." Wayne feigns offense and says she will now need to give her "number, address, social security [number], [and] panty size" for him to consider accepting her apology. She chuckles and says she needs to handle the business first and he adds "pum pum [vagina] size." He and Biggs laugh and Biggs tells him through his laughter that he is telling him that he is "dutty [dirty]" when she comes back to let them know that their bill comes to "sixty-seven *thousand* dollars." She emphasizes the thousand, looking at them for a reaction and asks "Is that okay with you?" Biggs simply says "yeah man," and the next shot is a tight shot of her hands counting crisp U.S. dollars. She offers to get them the receipts and accompanying packages, but as Wayne is telling her that they do not need any of that because they will wear them out, Raquel walks in with six bags. Biggs jokes about all of her purchases and she says that she "didn't even get everything I wanted" as she begins looking through them and then at Biggs's new watch. When she asks poutingly, "Where's mine?" Biggs and Wayne laugh. At this moment, the

salesperson suddenly offers them drinks: "Coffee, tea, water, champagne, whatever," then turns to Wayne and asks in a child-like voice, "Can I get *you* something?" He looks at her, music starts playing and she beckons him with an index finger to follow her.

She takes him to a back room and throws him against the wall and they start pawing at each other's clothes. She is suddenly insatiable, kissing and pulling at Wayne, who now has her jacket-dress unbuttoned. A close-up of their hips shows him taking his gun out of the front of his pants and placing it on a nearby table. Her back is to the camera covering most of Wayne's body and we can see the red lace of her bra. His hands trace up her legs and around her buttocks (which is conveniently given full view to the camera in a lacy thong). The camera cuts to a profile shot and Wayne spins her around so that he is now behind her. She holds on to the top of a tall chair and we can see her red bra and bare skin beneath the open jacket-dress. He pulls her thong down her legs, and the camera jump cuts three different times to slow down the process. The next shot still has them in profile from the waist up (he having presumably taken his other "gun" out) and he pushes her forward by the neck so they can have sex. Although she later raises herself to an upright position, Wayne gives her two slaps on the butt as they are engaged.

This short scene is disturbing on multiple levels, but what is most important to this argument is what it teaches the viewer about what "real"

men do. Earlier in this chapter, Sammo summarized Southside gender politics by saying: "When you are a shotter, you get everything free" (240). Because Wayne and Biggs are shottas, they have large sums of money at all times. Their money is free because they have stolen it outright or have had it delivered to them through threats of possible violence if there is objection. Their large sums of money enable them to attract (and have sex) with beautiful women, even in the back room of a mall boutique moments after meeting. This means that women and sex are free because they are clearly willing to offer themselves if there is any hint that free money will come their way. There is no need for real conversation or courtship or even first names! The large sums of money also give shottas access to material goods. Biggs and Wayne have a fleet of luxury cars and jewelry that is worth thousands of dollars. Right before the Porsche scene, Richie asks his son what he wants for his birthday and his son lets him know that he wants "five million dollars" so that he can "buy some clothes, shoes, jewelry and women." This pre-teen boy already understands that women are one of the commodities that can be bought as if sitting on a shelf. The salesperson literally throws herself at Wayne once she sees all of Raquel's purchases. She gives Wayne cursory and mildly playful attention before they buy the watches. However, once she realizes that Wayne is "the main man," her attitude swiftly changes reinforcing the implication that all women turn into insatiable sex kittens for the right price (the virgin turned whore). Now that she presumably finds "the

main man," she goes to the dance with them later that night (where they arrive in a private jet). However, when bullets start to fly and Biggs yanks someone out of a nearby car to quickly get them out of the frantic mob, she is left behind and never seen again. Biggs even asks Wayne as he is about to speed off, "Where's Abbey?" Wayne simply shouts, "Fuck Abbey!" The first time we hear her name, she is promptly erased from the script. She is truly disposable and serves her only purpose of affirming Wayne's masculinity. The fact that he could get the attention and sexual favor from a beautiful woman, (who would incidentally qualify as Jamaican "brown"), in less than twenty-four hours is an intoxicating and dangerous message.

More importantly, it adds more fuel to the idea that Biggs and Wayne are legitimate businessmen. It is somewhat ironic that thieves are shopping for anything as though spending their hard-earned salary on a weekend out with the family. However, proving that he has "cash" to spend, fulfills the call to prove that he is a breadwinner. Barry Chevannes reminds us that the need to be a breadwinner is one of the major responsibilities for Caribbean men: "a man's role is to provide for his spouse and his children – food, clothing, education and shelter" (*Learning* 222). He goes on to stress the true heart of these financial obligations:

. . . for some men there is a connection between their criminal activities and servicing the social construction of their manhood. . . . men who do not hustle for their families are stigmatized by their community as

wotlis [worthless]. In these communities, the survival ethos trips in as rationalization for whatever actions, by hook or by crook, a man deems necessary to meet personal and social obligations. For him the need to survive is far more compelling than the benefit of an education with its future and therefore uncertain promise, for on his survival rests that of his woman and his children. He must survive. There is no greater imperative. In the circumstances of the ghetto it is his *raison d'être*. (223, italics in original)

We see Ratty's comment of building a better life by hook or by crook repeated here, along with young Biggs's sentiment about education not being a priority. With or without children, men are under pressure to be financially stable as well as survive. But mediocrity is unacceptable. Although Floyd from *Third World Cop* seems financially stable and surviving just fine, his life falls in the shadows of mediocrity. True desirability rests in the barrel of a big gun and big wealth and the images in this film take financial stability and survival to a whole other level. Yet painting Biggs and Wayne like average working-class men who pay their dues in jobs they only do out of obligation, only adds to the violent brute image and feeds the anti-immigrant hysteria already swirling in the U.S. The insinuation is that the only "jobs" they take seriously are the dishonest "jobs" of murder and mayhem, and that they have no real respect for laws, authority or rules. They are back in America illegally, making their own rules and answering only to themselves. The subtext is that

no laws can hold them because they are essentially uncontrollable (like Ratty). More significantly, the ending hammers in the point that violence with a big gun is the only way to become “the main man.”

The Final Showdown

In the very end, Biggs drives a speedboat through the coastal Miami waters after the day’s carnage. The city’s twinkling night gleam surrounds him and he seems peaceful. But he is heading to Teddy’s house in the darkness for revenge. Creeping up the dock steps in a hood, he kills Teddy’s bodyguard and later Teddy’s girlfriend. Parallel to Raquel’s death (Biggs’s girlfriend), Marcia’s death pairs violence and sexuality because the close-up of her exposed artificial breasts also frame her chest wound. After this blow, a broken Teddy offers Biggs seven million dollars that he has stashed in his house. Biggs makes him get it and haul it out in two large duffle bags. Then to amplify this sexualization of guns and violence, Biggs forces Teddy into a feminized position. As Biggs points his gun at him, Teddy begs, “What else you want from me? You kill me gyal. I give you everything I have. What else you want from me?” Biggs slowly backs the pleading Teddy up to his outdoor Jacuzzi (where Marcia was floating face-up), puts the barrel of his gun into Teddy’s mouth and pulls the trigger with the response, “Your soul.” Teddy falls back into the water dead. Given the virulence for homosexuality

in Jamaica, it is not surprising that this homoerotic moment is answered with violence. There is no other way a *shotta* would have his phallic gun in the mouth of another man except to kill him. And since Teddy is turned into the woman, forced into submission as the feminized object by taking the phallus into his mouth, he is no longer a man. He is the disdained “pussyhole” that Biggs calls him when he first gets back in town. Like the words “bitch” or “bloodclaat,” (claat being a sanitary pad), the most virulent cuss words are attached to the female body and enforce sexist constructions of women as inferior to men. As Tara Atluri says, “Men who are too feminine are faggots; women who are too masculine are dykes. Their bodies are sexed in negative terms, and homophobia seeks to both punish and correct them, while reinforcing the superiority of the heterosexual” (9). This sexism is consistent with the general disregard of women throughout the film, and guarantees that having a gun in your mouth is not a place of power. Therefore, Teddy becomes expendable.

Biggs takes the money and drives his speedboat back through the night. The cityscape surrounds him as he navigates the waters, and a gospel-sounding reggae tune plays in the background. The film ends with a silhouette of his head and half of his back in the foreground and a brightening morning horizon in the background. He is sitting by the water’s edge watching the rising sun in the distance, as he holds his hands over his face and leans his head back. He runs his hands through his hair and holds

the sides of his head, then holds his head down, then back to toss his locs off of his face. He sits still for a moment staring out over the water, then hangs his head down onto his chest, his locs falling around him. He holds his head back up and continues to stare towards the distant land, noticeably void of any buildings except two possible industrial tanks. There are no other signs of life – no birds, no boats, no people, no cityscape – and the screen fades to black. Like Capone, Biggs is left standing alone with his closest friend/little brother/child-figure stripped from him. He is the father-figure that watches his son die (and one might be able to argue that Biggs was ultimately responsible for putting Wayne on this path). But instead of walking off into the proverbial sunset like Capone, or being gunned down like Ivan, or in jail like Wesley, Biggs watches the sun rise. It is a new day. And unlike Capone, Ivan or Wesley, Biggs is on *American* shores with seven million U.S. dollars and a gun.

While Biggs represents the “transnational infection” or parasite that Mimi Shellers described earlier, he is also painted as the pen-ultimate success story. He makes it to America and he gets the riches (as well as the “bitches”). Biggs does not need to go back “home” to Jamaica because he proves that he has the biggest most lethal gun, which in turn proves that he is neither failed citizen nor failed man. And being the phallus, this big gun is technically how men are taught to reproduce themselves. Like Ivan in the novel and film, as well as the real life Rhygin from the 1940s, the phallic gun becomes the way

to recreate oneself, because all of these men live on in legend. However Biggs cheats death and still becomes legendary – he kills Teddy Bruck Shot and takes all of his money. It is precisely because Biggs *is* violent that he becomes legendary. He does not live on in legend because he is a peacemaker.

The losses along the way are merely the collateral damage that one must endure in the struggle to become a “real” man. Although his close friend is sacrificed, more women and money will certainly come -- after all, violence is the way that he got them in the first place. Therefore, the implicit message is that Biggs can rebuild a sense of self as long as his gun is by his side. All of the grief he is experiencing can be worked through with gun in hand. Like Capone, he too is hardened, but he is still standing and most likely encircled by a shroud of silence. However, this is not seen as a bad thing. As Robert Arjet argues,

In the end there is one purpose of the gun in male relationships that stands out as possibly the most harmful. Dysfunctional, homosocial, and misogynist as they may be, many of the relationships depicted in these films are intimate ones, relationships in which men embrace, profess their love, care for each other, and find trust, respect, and sympathy. Repeatedly, however, gunplay stands in for the real emotional work that actually produces intimacy in relationships. (136)

From playing as children in Waterhouse to becoming shottas in Miami, Biggs and Wayne forge their friendship around gunplay. This representation

presents no alternatives to developing a male identity. The rare introspective moments that Biggs *does* have, are always brushed off by Wayne. When Biggs tells him back in Jamaica that it is “monsters we ah create,” there is a second of silence in which the truth begins to penetrate. But Wayne quickly fills it with the swift comment, “Lemme get you a gyal.” Because these moments are so few and far between, viewers are left with the impression that guns and violence are the most important pieces of male identity. Moreover, we take away the lesson that “the power of the gun is not, after all, in terms of physical power . . . but in terms of emotional power – the power to cancel out grief, bind men together, and heal deep psychological wounds” (Arjet, 137). This is ultimately damaging because young men looking to recycle this gangster image will never cultivate the internal resources to cope with loss, connect with loved ones or interact in the world without the filter of violence. They will always be masking, always shielding their true selves behind a stifling performance. Linton Kwesi Johnson’s poem “Story” summarizes this veiled vulnerability so magnificently, that it will serve as the conclusion:

STORY

wance upan a time
jus like inna nursery rime
before piggy tun swine

mi did wear
me fear
pan mi face
like a shiel
like a mawsk

an evrybady tink mi cool an deadly

notn yu couda seh

woodah mek mi tek it awf
an if yu get mi nervos
ah woulda jus lawf it awf

an evrybody tink mi cool an deadly

but nat soh lang ago
jus like inna pitcha show
whe di hero get a blow
mi spirit get vex
an mi get soh resless
dat mi get careless
an goh bare mi mawgah chess

mi nevah eendah tink seh
dat it mek out a glass
dat di whole wide worl couda si
rite dung to di vien inna mi awt

how dem twis-up
how dem tie-up
how dem tite-up
o mi awt
how it cut-up
how it crawl-up
hot it scar-up

(it is a aad awt [hard art] fi mawstah yu know
dis smiling an skinin yu teet
wen yu awt [when your heart] swell-up soh till yu feel it a goh bus
wen yu cyan fine di rime fi fit di beat
wen yu cyan fine di ansah fi di puzzle complete)

soh now mi tek awf mi mawsk
an staat fi wear daak glass
but evry so awftin
mi haffi tek it awf
an evry nowanden
mi fine mi laas [lost]

oonu evah
si mi trial
si mi crawsiz?
(43 – 44)

Under the “cool and deadly” masculinity mask, his heart is more fragile than he thinks – he never thought that it was “mek out a glass.” However, because he recognizes that his heart is twisted, tied, tight, cut and scarred from the

perpetual performance that hegemonic masculinity requires, he tries to be less impenetrable, trading dark glass for the “mawsk.” But when he occasionally takes the “mawsk” off completely, he finds that “mi lass.” This fear and sense of exposure speaks to the larger issue of there being very few highly visible options upon which to construct maleness. While there are viable alternatives, the feeling of being lost speaks to the difficulty of choosing these alternatives when faced with the glamorous images of the gunman presented in *Third World Cop* and *Shottas*. Perhaps the consequences from factual experiences of gunmen will help to diffuse some of the romanticization that is attached to masculinity, physical power and that power’s expression in violence. The next chapter hopes to deepen these traditional representations, as well as inject a hard dose of cruel reality, by looking at “first-person” accounts of these “heroes.”

CHAPTER FOUR

The Dare

Laurie Gunst's 1995 book *Born Fi' Dead* is, as the subtitle iterates, "a journey through the yardie underworld." Like the word "shotta," "yardie" is Jamaican patois for "fellow countryman" but it tends to have a poor or working-class association and thus a connotation of authenticity. It symbolizes the everyday masses and can also mean "a Jamaican residing overseas" (56). Gunst is a wealthy, white, Jewish-American historian and journalist, who earned her doctorate from Harvard in 1982 where she researched the connections between the African slave trade and the Spanish Caribbean (xviii). This research on the Spanish Caribbean somehow leads her to Jamaica many times and she begins feeling a "certain resonance between this bitter history and Jamaica's contemporary reckoning" (xviii). She eventually accepts a position at the University of the West Indies (UWI) in Kingston where she moves to teach history for a professor on leave in the fall of 1984. However, she admits that her real purpose in taking this job was "to write the secret history of the gunmen and their links with Jamaica's elected leaders" (xvi).

After several isolated months at UWI, a graduate student that she knew introduces her to an old friend of his named Homer. Homer is a black actor from Central Kingston, and he eventually becomes her romantic

partner. In their knowing each other, Homer learns about her project and insists that she meet one of his close childhood friends, a prolific photographer named Brambles. She tells the story of their meeting differently in *Born Fi' Dead*, where she makes it seem as though they coincidentally happened upon each other during a government tour of recently flooded lands. But in her 2005 memoir she admits that Homer suggests that they meet. Either way, it is through Brambles that Gunst slowly penetrates various Kingston communities and makes the numerous invaluable connections that inform her book. She says in the memoir,

Little by little, Brambles befriended me. The more we talked and walked side by side through the lanes and yards of Central, the more he came to believe in the book I hoped to write. At first he could not be convinced that I wasn't a spy.

"Who it is you really work for, sis?" he'd ask, a frown knitting his wide brow. . . . "CIA?" . . . "DEA? FBI?"

But after a few months of this, he quit asking. We'd been in several scrapes by then. We were at a street dance where gunfire broke out and twice we were tailed by police. To Brambles, my determination not to let these mishaps get in our way was proof of my seriousness. One by one, he began introducing me to the men he knew who had connections to the gangs. (206)

As a white privileged woman, she dares to bridge the worlds of uptown and downtown to tell the hidden story behind the violence in Jamaica's inner-city communities. She gets plenty of warnings from her UWI colleagues not to venture far from campus, but she feels compelled to speak to the people that she sees as challenging the hegemonic construction of canonical "History." In so doing, she wants to give power to marginalized voices to tell their own histories in their own words (albeit mediated by her):

Us and them – the line of demarcation, never to be crossed, that separated the downtown poor from the fearful but fortunate uptowners.

But I had a reason for crossing this line. The Jamaican sufferers come from the same tradition as the griots of West Africa; *they are the storyteller-historians* who preserve the legends of a people, and they alone are the keepers of the posses' saga. I couldn't chronicle the exploits of gang leaders who were also *Robin Hood heroes* in the ghettos unless I went to stand with the sufferers on common ground. (xvi, emphasis added)

She acknowledges that there is power in community voice as well as in community "leaders," although there is a tinge of elitism (which we will return to later). Here we see her pick up the thread of love/hate, admiration/fear that is attached to the legacy of the black brute. The gang leaders are positioned as "Robin Hood heroes" while simultaneously

responsible for a lot of the sufferers' suffering! Like Biggs from *Shottas* and Ivan from *The Harder They Come*, these men are legendary and their stories fascinate her. However, like Ivan, many of them are mimicking a performance of what they regard as "real" toughness and dominant masculinity as they perceive it in *movies* – a fact that should remind us that Perry Henzell and Trevor Rhone based Ivan's obsession with Westerns in that film on realities that they witnessed (and possibly experienced) in everyday life. Gunst finds that this cinematic fascination with what "reel" men are supposed to be extends well into the 1990s and she is fascinated by the connection:

. . . long before the posses began migrating to America, they were learning bad-guy style from Hollywood. These island desperados are the bastard offspring of Jamaica's violent political "shitsem" (as the Rastafarians long ago dubbed it) and the gunslinger ethos of American movies. They are a Caribbean cultural hybrid: tropical bad guys acting out fantasies from the spaghetti westerns, kung fu kill flicks, *Rambo* sequels, and *Godfather* spin-offs that play nightly in Kingston's funky movie palaces and flicker constantly behind young men's eyes. The posse men see themselves as Clint Eastwood in *Dirty Harry*, Al Pacino in *Scarface*, or – if they are old enough to remember the 1960s – the rampaging misfits from Sam Peckinpah's *Wild Bunch*. I was captivated by this crazy synthesis between Hollywood and Jamaica's Johnny-Too-

Bad renegades; it was my way into the culture of this outlaw world.

(xv – xvi)

She even gives a nod to the power of Westerns as well as Ivan's iconography in the construction of violent Jamaican masculinity:

The gunmen infused their cruelty with a certain cinematic style, a cool detachment from the agony they inflicted. Most of these paladins had come of age in the 1950s and 1960s, when Hollywood churned out countless westerns, and Jamaicans began a long love affair with the legendary bandits of the silver screen. No one who has seen Perry Henzell's 1973 masterpiece *The Harder They Come* can forget the scene where its country-boy hero Ivan O. [sic] Martin comes to Kingston hungry for fame as a singer and goes to his first movie in town. . . .

Like hundreds of Jamaican gangsters before and after, he lives and dies with gunslinger bravado acquired from the movies. (xxi – xxii)

A "bravado acquired from the movies." Like Linton Kwesi Johnson's "mawsk," this bravado is an acquisition. It is a performance cobbled together from a scripted performance that is delivered by *actors*, and young men adopt *that* script and walk around hidden beneath a cape of coolness that shrouds their true selves. Remember, the ultimate goal is to make everyone else "tink mi cool an deadly" (43), but it is based on mythic ideas of masculinity – fictive characters from a movie screen. Nevertheless, their images have very real consequences. Gunst finds out just how much:

I discovered the power of that myth as I came to know the gunmen and sufferers of Kingston. We shared an affinity with the Wild West, and this carried us across many a cultural bridge. . . . I had gone to meet a ranking nicknamed “Billy the Kid” who was very reluctant to talk to me until someone mentioned that I’d only recently come to Jamaica from Wyoming.

“Whoy,” Billy breathed in a reverent whisper. “I know ‘bout that place! Nuff-nuff bad-mon come from out there! Hole-in-the-Wall, Butch Cassidy an’ the Sundance Kid...”(xxii)

The fact that she is able to reap some cultural capital from her mere association with the “Wild West” speaks volumes. It is not the premise of her project or her desire to put “sufferers” on center stage that gets his attention. With a nickname like “Billy the Kid,” he is impressed only by her connections to the model of masculinity that he clearly strives to emulate. He respects the legends of irreverent violence are respected and these are the only things that get his attention and ironically his trust. And the even more ironic twist is that her last name is pronounced “*guns*” – as she tells a Jamaican officer who is writing her name down in his appointment book, it is “‘Guns, with a t’” (122).

Gunst’s tale is a chorus of faces and places from the shotta world behind Jamaica’s political landscape. She paints an historical, participant-observer narrative that she originally envisions as “history and traveler’s

tale" (xiii). As a UWI professor, she lives in Kingston for two years and then follows the shotta runnings back to New York where she says she spent another five years with Jamaican gang members (*Off-White* 228). *Born Fi' Dead* is the culmination of that "research" and logically extends from Kingston to Brooklyn. Although her subjectivity raises some occasional questions (which will be addressed later), the usefulness of her text lies in the stretches of space that she gives to the various people that she interviews – the people she calls in the earlier quote, the "storyteller-historians who preserve the legends of a people" (xvi). It is in these stories that we can see the indelible footprints that violence stomps across people's lives. The premise of the book rests on the power of people's stories and the stories themselves teeter between the beauty and bestiality that violence can bring. The inspiration for the book title comes from a dub poem that captures this delicate dance of contradiction – birth and death as two sides of the same coin.

When she visits Wilmot Perkins, a Jamaican journalist who hosts a call-in radio show from Mandeville, Jamaica, she sees the poem on his office wall and is immediately struck by its power:

*Nihilist?
Lumpen?
Uptown bullshit.
Respect I a' deal wid.
Respect me area, respect me brethren, respect me woman.
Diss me, an' you momma, poppa, granny, pickney a' go feel it.
Diss me, an' a one bullet fire.
It no matter. I 'ave a dog heart.
If me dead, a so man **born fi' dead**.
Accepting this offering, Papa Ogun sits on his hilltop,*

*Wondering when his own mortality will be tested.
And in history's dustbin, Marx bides his time.* (241, italics in original, bold added)

Mr. Perkins says that he knows nothing about it outside of the fact that his “secretary brought it from Kingston” (241). The author only signs his name as “Wayne,” an ironic development given that this is also the name of the character in *Shottas*. That Wayne acts swiftly and violently to any perceived disrespect, while this poet Wayne brings a very different energy. He is also concerned about individual respect, but simultaneously brings a communal spirit with the invocation of Marx. It also seems as though he predicts that violence has a limited life because Papa Ogun, the Yoruba god of war, will have to face his *own* mortality – it is not a matter of “if” but “when” it will be tested. Poet Wayne also critiques the assumption that the masses are socially inferior (Lumpen?) or even that they feel that life is meaningless (Nihilist?), casting both of these categorizations off as uptown stereotypes. However, there are still violent undertones woven throughout this poem because he becomes the mad dog on the loose when he admits that he has “a’ dog heart” and that he is willing to die if necessary: “If me dead, a so man born fi’ dead” [If I die, I was born to die/meant to die]. There is a tinge of resignation that is wrapped around these words as though there is an expectation that life will be cut short – a parallel to Bogart’s sentiments in novel of *The Harder They Come*: “Live fast, die young, have a good-looking corpse” (202). But there is also an assumption that poet Wayne will be around to eternally protect his

“area, brethren (friends, family, community) and woman.” This model of hegemonic masculinity reinforces patriarchy and becomes the bedrock upon which a “real” manhood is built. It goes back to the portrait of Biggs and Wayne as working-class stiffing out to protect their family and make an honest living. Moreover, he is willing to kill the innocent in the fulfillment of his role as protector and provider – your mother, father, grandmother and children “a’ go feel it” if necessary. Like Ratty said, he will survive by hook or by crook. This definitely reinforces mad dog imagery as well as extends the legacy of the savage black brute that is both admired and feared.

Overall then, the poem is a useful prism through which to analyze the book because it highlights the three major elements that I want to discuss – the love/hate of the dons themselves, those who wind up dead because of them and the various ways that despair manifests itself in a world besieged by violence. Each account acts as a counterpoint to the flashy images that are represented by Biggs and Wayne, because as we will see, trying to be “real/reel” men has very different costs in real life.

The Dons

Eric “Chinaman” Vassell

Vassell is the leader of the PNP affiliated McGregor Gully gang. He joins the posse in 1972 when Manley won the election: “Vassell was only a kid then, but he was old enough to run with the crew of gun-loving youths

who apprenticed themselves to the party's older enforcers" (183). And he gets his nickname because he is "light-skinned and half-Chinese" (183). However, he also has a string of other aliases. As Gunst lists, "Besides 'Chinaman,' he was also known on the street as 'the King,' 'the Don,' 'Brooklyn Barry,' and 'the IRS.' That one was bestowed because Chinaman taxed his soldiers for revenue and then used the money to buy clothing, Walkmans, VCRs, and guns for the McGregor Gully sufferers in Kingston. The goods went down in cardboard barrels all year long, but most of them were hoarded for the annual Easter treat that Chinaman put on every spring" (186).

As the first don to sell heroine in New York (185 – 186), his money and influence explode because in the mid-1980s, "New York police initiated Operation Pressure Point to drive smack dealers out of Manhattan's Lower East Side, and Vassell reaped the whirlwind as buyers moved elsewhere for their connections (186). However, he uses a lot of his money to shore up his Robin Hood status with the aforementioned "treats." As Gunst explains, "treats" are like major holidays:

These treats were held every Easter, a season of great celebration in Jamaica. In the day of slavery, Easter – like Christmas – was a time when masters might give their slaves a new article of clothing or a tiny ration of meat. Now the Gully posse's don, Eric "Chinaman" Vassell, was continuing this tradition with funds derived from cocaine and heroin instead of sugar and rum. (10)

An FBI agent, Bob Chacon, wants Gunst to see a videotape seized during a 1990 raid on Gully headquarters in Brooklyn, New York. As she says, it was “made in Kingston, Jamaica during one of the last ‘treats’ that the Gully put on for the sufferers at home” (10).

She explains:

The scene Bob Chacon cues up on the VCR is a beauty pageant for preteen girls, filmed by Crat Vassell, Eric’s brother and public relations man. Crat had panned his camera out over the packed, klieg-lit night crowd on the Gully’s soccer field and then closed in on the stage where the girls paraded in their best dresses. . . . each one was wearing a satin sash across her budding breasts, inscribed with the name of whichever posse soldier had sponsored her. There was Miss Sean, Miss Jukie, Miss Ever-Reds. . . .

Just before the winning beauty queen is announced, a little girl steps up to the microphone with a prepared speech of gratitude for Eric Vassell, even though he is far away in Brooklyn too.

“We can remember the first day we had this treat like it was yesterday,” she trills. “This is the fifth year since Barry and the Schenectady Crew” – she has a hard time with the unfamiliar word, the Brooklyn street where the Gully posse was based, and the mistress of ceremonies has to pronounce it for her – “from the United States of America have shown their love and care for us citizens of McGregor

settlement. *We are grateful for this kind of togetherness, and we pray that this will never cease.* The Schenectady Crew, words cannot say how much we love and care for you. Barry, *you are extremely loving and caring, and that's what makes you one in a million.*" (12 – 13, emphasis added)

This type of event does nothing but bolster the don's reputation of being a "Robin Hood hero." More importantly, it buys posse allegiance and convinces people from a very young age to maintain the status quo. Of course the togetherness that she speaks of is based on rigid divisions between posse territories and washed in the blood of countless victims. Therefore, her prayer that "this will never cease" is both wonderfully naïve and quietly chilling. Although she *is* caught in a cycle that does not seem like it will cease, it is not for the loving reasons that she imagines. Because Chacon was one of the agents at the 1990 police raid, he is still bitter that Vassell manages to elude the dragnet. The material goods that Vassell regularly sent to his Kingston community when he was in Brooklyn, convince Chacon that Vassell most likely escaped to Jamaica and will never be extradited for trial in New York:

"When you see how dons like Chinaman are loved by the people in Kingston, you understand why they're untouchable. No one down there is going to cooperate with us to get them extradited. They're safe. Totally safe." (13)

This safety underscores the *love* factor in the love/hate equation that is associated with these dons. They represent not only power, but wealth and resources in a community where resources are scarce. This allegiance helps to perpetuate the cycle through which a don's constituency will be willing to fight anyone for their associated party leaders' ascendancy:

Chinaman called the guns he sent to Kingston "vote getters" for the PNP, part of the Gully's election-time arsenal. But even without the pressure of elections, Gully people still had to defend themselves not only against [rival Shower posse don] Jim Brown's JLP terrorists, but also against Seaga's police. (186)

But this snippet sadly reminds us that violence is an everyday thing in some parts of Jamaica. Young men growing up with this kind of pressure will undoubtedly find it hard to forge identities that are anything less than impenetrable. Everyone must think they are as hard as a Capone or a Biggs. This "cool and deadly" mask seems like a form of self-preservation because it can theoretically keep people a respectful distance away, but in reality impenetrable manhood (read "real") is always tested and always proven and always leads to a dead-end.

Delroy "Uzi" Edwards

Delroy Edwards is the gang leader of the JLP posse known as The Renkers. He got his nickname "from the gun he favored and his reputation

from his days as a mercenary in Kingston . . . It was the JLP that had given him his first job as a Southside ranking. The party hired him for a princely ten dollars a week during the 1980 election campaign to shoot the PNP out of Southside, part of the neighborhood that was Michael Manley's own constituency" (4 - 5). He tells Gunst that he came up with the name of the posse because "'It means stinky . . . like the smell when you piss against a wall'" (5), and the idea of being cast as the obnoxious rule-breaker that leaves a stench behind delights him. He too leaves Kingston and comes to New York to put together a deadly crew built around drugs and murder. But eventually he is caught.

In the summer of 1989, Edwards's trial begins and the *New York Post* runs a headline that vilifies the entire Jamaican community by ethnic association: "JAMAICAN GOT CITY HOOKED ON CRACK" (159). Indeed Edwards's trial was a sensation. For starters, John Gleeson, the assistant lead attorney on the 1986 John Gotti (Mafia don) trial, was one of the prosecutors on Edwards's trial. Additionally, Edwards was the first Jamaican don to be prosecuted under the federal RICO (Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations) statute (145). However, the blooms from the planted seeds of an infectious black Caribbean body made it easy for prosecutors to take actions such as this:

The Treasury Department had drawn up a list with some twenty thousand names of Jamaicans living in this country, some of whom

had been arrested for nothing more serious than a traffic violation. District Attorney Robert M. Morgenthau was using the list to help prosecute suspected posse members, and Jamaicans in New York were infuriated by this stigmatization of a primarily law-abiding and hardworking people. They sought help from the American Civil Liberties Union, which argued that the list violated the civil rights of all Jamaicans in this country.

“What we object to,” said Una Clarke, head of the newly formed Jamaican Committee on Civil Rights, “is using the word Jamaican in front of drug gangs. No one says Italian Mafia or Irish Westies” – the name of a notorious Irish gang in the Hell’s Kitchen district of Manhattan’s West Side – “so they shouldn’t say Jamaican drug posses either.” (158)

The invasive black body, the mad dog running loose had been finally captured and the jury was poised to lock him away for life. However, they had to get through a month and a half of testimony. During those weeks, the jurors’ worst nightmares came to life as the horrific acts of violence were retold. As Gunst says,

The litany of beatings, shootings, and stabbings became monotonous after only a few days of testimony. Sometimes the sheer monotony had an impact of its own, however, coupled as it was with a cool affectlessness that stunned the jury. When Kenneth Manning

described killing Devon Steer, one of his soldiers in Washington, it sounded like the steps of a recipe.

"I shoot him in the head," he told John Gleeson.

"Where in his head?" asked Gleeson.

"Back of his head."

"How many times did you shoot him?"

"Once."

The driver of the car panicked when Steer's corpse got wedged in the front seat, but Manning managed to dislodge it as they drove and dumped it down an incline. Then he told the driver to set fire to the car.

"What did you do after you found out that the evidence was burned?" Gleeson asked.

"I don't do nothing. I go to sleep," Manning answered.

After the trial was over, a female juror told me that this remark had frightened her so badly that she couldn't sleep for three days. (161)

These stories represent the *hate* side of the love/hate equation of the black brute and feed into the idea of murder as a simple day job for these men, a warped version of a self-made man: "another hard day at the office" as Biggs would say. But they also represent the intentional construction of hegemonic masculinity, the building of a prescribed identity that is based on violence and toughness and what they imagine "real" manhood to be. Brambles knew

Delroy before he came to New York and he describes him as one of the many Southside youth striving to make a name for themselves. One of his early memories of the young Delroy back in Jamaica captures the evolution of what a young Biggs might have been like in Miami when he paid Sando to help him get back to America:

“He was a fryer, that’s all,” . . .

He thought back to the days when he first knew Delroy, before the JLP gave him guns, and he called Delroy “an impressionist,” meaning that he was just a charismatic thug who had a sufferer’s camaraderie with those around him.

“But he turned into a monster in the 1980 time,” . . . “And when him come up here, was like him could never really get enough. *Him haffi’ prove himself all over again.* There was always an agonizing frustration. Seem like some o’ the things them say he did in Brooklyn, he did them fi’ get back fi’ the way things was at home.” (147 – 148, emphasis added)

The way things were back at home in Jamaica meant that Delroy had built a reputation for ruthlessness. In a new country and new neighborhood (a kind of *rootlessness*), his maleness is unfortunately not a given in his mind. Like Ivan in the novel, he carries a vision of what “real” men do. Therefore, he recreates a city version of himself (like Ivan in the film) to gain so-called “respect” and stature through even more ruthlessness. Sadly, like the young

Biggs looking up to Sando, other young men want to follow Delroy and his example. When Gunst asks Brambles if he thinks that Delroy really committed all of the murders that he was on trial for, Brambles explains the influential power of a don:

“Me tell you how the killin’ really goes. When you is a don, inna’ your work, a youth might hear some lickle joke ‘pon you. And *without you even tell him to go an’ kill the joker, he will jus’ do it, jus’ fi’ big-up himself in your eyes.* Jus’ fi’ mek himself into a notch.”

Brambles paused to screw up his face and suck his teeth in a dazzling imitation of rude-boy viciousness. “An’ then he will come to you an’ say, ‘Boss, disya’ bumba-clot bwoy dead! The stinkin’ blood-clot bwoy dead!’ So you see now how it really a’ go? If you is a coke [cocaine] don an’ a nex’ mon come rob your stash, your soldier will jus’ kill him fi’ defend you. So most o’ them killin’ where you hear go on with Delroy, him nah’ even haffi’ tell him youth fi’ do them thing. *When you is a don, a youth jus’ go kill fi’ you, fi’ please you.* Delroy wouldn’t want to hot-up himself personally.” (148, emphasis added)

Young men try to outdo one another by killing on *behalf* of another man that did not even ask them to do so – they seek to affirm *their* life as male by coldly taking the life of what is generally *other* men. They continue to kill and kill in hopes of building their own lives, in hopes that the don will grant them the pass of being a “real” man. That is some formidable power. But this kind

of power most likely means that the don himself is also pressed to be even more violent, and more brutal to maintain this semblance of superiority, this illusion of being the alpha male. As Brambles sadly reminds us, a large portion of men's energy is spent trying to impress other men. As homoerotic as that sounds, the irony is that these impressions actually strive to ensure a man's unquestionable heterosexuality, (whether true or not), through tough, cold-heartedness. And as said in a previous chapter of this project, this performance is learned in childhood and reinforced throughout one's life. bell hooks makes an insightful point about African American men that works well here. She says,

Very few black males dare to ask themselves why they do not rebel against the racist, sexist status quo and invent new ways of thinking about manhood, about what it means to be responsible, about what it means to invent one's life. Often black males are unable to think creatively about their lives because of their *uncritical acceptance of narrow life-scripts* shaped by patriarchal thinking. Yet individual black men provide models that show it is possible to go against the grain, to change the conventional script. The failure of black males to look to those black males who have liberated themselves via new life maps is rooted in *misguided allegiance to the status quo* – an allegiance that is cultivated during childhood. (86, emphasis added)

Individual models of masculinity that go against the grain of the dominant life-scripts are outshone by the gleam from the shotta lifestyle, the magnetism of the don. This gangster style is seen as ideal and most men want to be the cow-*bwoy* shotta hero in their everyday lives; and when their life is over, most want to leave a story behind that keeps their names on the community's lips in a legendary, awe-filled way. These are the men that get the most public attention, making it seem as though there is just one way of being. This "narrow life-script" calls for killing someone just to please a don so that the don will remember your story. There is seemingly no reason to be like Floyd in *Third World Cop*. Floyd leads a "simple" life and has "no story" and this is not attractive. This is supposedly unacceptable. But this "allegiance to the status quo" takes a toll on all involved and sometimes the victims live to tell their story as well. This happens during Delroy Edwards's trial, as Gunst explains:

There were very few Renkers victims who were still alive to testify; one of them was a soft-eyed Jamaican named Rudolph Simms. He wheeled himself to the stand, paralyzed from the waist down by a bullet from one of Delroy's gunmen. Simms had made the mistake of going to a grocery store near the corner of Sterling Place and Schenectady Avenue one night for a "hot dragon" – unchilled stout. He had hung out with the McGregor Gully posse, who controlled that corner, but he happened to be there at the wrong time. The Gully had

just done a drive-by shooting on the Renkers, and Delroy wanted revenge. So [on December 7, 1987] he ordered a soldier named Stanley McCall to go to the Gully corner and shoot “anyone who looks Jamaican.” That was Rudolph Simms.

“I shot him two or three times,” McCall said coldly. “Then I turned around to where Delroy was watching from across the street. When I got back to the car, he said, ‘You see that man you shot? When he fell, you should have gone up and put the gun to his head.’”

Someone from the Gully posse later told me that Simms’s nickname was “Pleasure.” His brother is the reggae singer Sugar Minott, and he used to do the soundboard at Sugar’s performances. At the end of his testimony, Jonny [sic] Frank got him to admit, in a voice just above a whisper, that because of his injury he would *never* be able to make love again. A collective sigh rippled through the courtroom and the woman next to me groaned. (162, emphasis added)

McCall is trying to prove his masculinity by shooting on command for Edwards to see. But like a father teaching a child how to shave, Edwards lets McCall know what he did wrong so that he can do it “right” the next time and, in theory, become a better man, a grown man. However, the prosecutor presses Simms to reveal that he can no longer have an erection because he is also aware that the jury carries an invisible projection of what “real” men do. Therefore, to detach a man from being able to control his penis is to

essentially rob him of wholeness and ultimately his maleness. Paradoxically, Simms's *phallic* gun is held out to be an essential part of masculinity, while McCall's *ballistic* gun is regarded as an extension of savagery. This is an interesting moment given that the legacy of the black brute casts black men as naturally violent and sexually dangerous, and even how castration was historically used as punishment for these allegations. Either way, emasculation is a key part of this testimony because the prosecutor recognizes how much power *not* being seen as a man carries in the public imagination.

This idea of how men operate in the public imagination takes on different meaning for some Jamaicans who come to hear parts of the testimony. Conti "Continental" Thomas is one such audience member, and he tells Gunst,

"I didn't come here to support Uzi," . . . "I come to watch him meet his doom. Everything they goin' to testify to in this court, we knew it 'pon the street long time now. That posse was nothing but scavengers. I'm here to listen 'bout how these guys squandered what they had" (160).

An interesting blend of disgust and curiosity, as if not squandering their wealth would have been mildly better because he would have at least fulfilled the requirement of manhood to "provide" (possibly like Eric Vassell). However, the idea that everyone knew what was happening "'pon the street long time now" speaks to the codes of silence and desensitization – another major issue wrapped up in masculine identity. Silence here has two

implications. First, everyone knows what is happening on the streets, but no one wants to be the dreaded “informa.” But second, men are not encouraged to speak to what is going on inside of their own bodies – they must endure an anesthetization of pain, concern, conflict or sadness. Delroy’s trial ends more than a month later and the judge captures the desensitization that occurred over that period of time:

“In the opening phase, that courtroom was so tense you could almost sense the jury stopped breathing,” Judge Dearie later told a reporter.

“The sharpness got out of it real fast, and we adjusted to the violence.”

The reporter said the judge “compares the adaptation he perceives in himself and the jurors to the adaptation the defendants must have made to actual events.” (163)

These are the narrow life-scripts that bell hooks mentions. However, although some men are not physically killed, they still experience an internal death.

Delroy Edwards is sentenced to 501 years (seven life sentences) without parole and a one million dollar fine. Gunst repeatedly visits Edwards in the Rikers Island penitentiary, but describes him during her first meeting as someone whose “eyes had the faraway, affectless gaze of a gunman who got old when he was still young” (149). His expression reminds us that maintaining the patriarchal performance of masculinity through violence is just as damaging as being murdered. As Robert Jensen says about the

children's game King of Hill (whose object is to be the last person standing on top of a figurative or literal hill):

King of the Hill reveals one essential characteristic of the dominant conception of masculinity: *No one is ever safe, and everyone loses something*. . . men are in constant struggle with each other for dominance. Every other man must in some way be subordinated to the king, but even the king can't feel too comfortable – he has to be nervous about who is coming up that hill to get him. . . This is masculinity lived as endless competition and threat. (27, emphasis added)

This affectless gaze is the consequence of internal death. Remember what Rafael Ramírez says in his study about Puerto Rican manhood: "Masculinity is very demanding" (59). But more importantly, upholding hegemonic masculinity takes a toll and desensitizes the soul, as the judge said in his closing remarks. Robert Jensen reminds us that in the pursuit of maintaining this status quo, "everyone loses something" (27). And this is the part that is perhaps most difficult to convey to young audiences enthralled by the scenes from movies like *Third World Cop*, *Shottas* or even *The Harder They Come*, since the "winner" is conceivably the one still standing. Or in the case of Ivan, the winner may die, but it is in a blaze of perceived glory. The truth is that the perpetual performance and constant being on guard is undoubtedly injurious mentally, emotionally and physically. And as always, the performance of

violent masculinity has even more deadly consequences as chronicled in the stories of the dead.

The Dead

As one might imagine, there are many chilling tales in a book that archives gang violence. However, three stories stand out for what they say about the construction of “real” manhood. Each puts a human face on the glossy cinematic projections, and gives us an idea how an imagined situation would really affect someone’s life. The first story highlights the cold cruelty that comes from moving through the world with “a dog heart,” the second story highlights the true cyclical nature of revenge, and the last story reminds us what breaking the status quo can really mean for the courageous.

Magie

One of the women that Gunst befriends is a young Jamaican mother named Shenda. She herself is wrestling with a crack addiction and gives Gunst insights about the contradictions that proliferate in the Brooklyn neighborhood where they spend a lot of their time. While walking past a familiar corner, Shenda tells her about one of the more painful memories of the neighborhood. She says,

“Everyone on the street knows Magie’s story. She came up from Kingston and did fine for the longest time, running this cookshop.

Until some dealer showed Magie 'bout cocaine. She fell in love with him and let him stash the stuff at her place, and soon she started dipping into it.

“Well, you know how when you eat one slice of cake, and then another, and then another? . . . Magie went through seven ounces of this guy’s coke, and when he came back he just tied her hands behind her back, stuffed her into a black plastic garbage bag, and threw off the roof.”

Shenda paused to wonder whether Magie could have survived that fall. “If he’d thrown her free-handed, maybe she wouldn’t have died. Could have just broken bones. But if your hands are tied behind you and you’re in a bag, you don’t see how far you have to go to the ground. Plus, the fear. When you’re in a bag, you’re disoriented. It’s like you’re going up a down staircase. . . .” (177 – 178)

Shenda’s attempt to rationalize this cruelty in the end, speaks to the larger system of legitimizing masculine cruelty. “If he’d thrown her free-handed” makes us beg the question as to why he would be throwing her at all. But in Shenda’s world, (like Ivan’s childhood world of stories in the novel), a vengeful man is a “real” man and ultimately a man whose behavior is not only expected, but a man whose behavior can be excused (and possibly forgiven). And the layers of corruption involved eliminate the possibility of going to the police because the original crime is cocaine trafficking. Not being

able to speak the truth to authorities or turn in the guilty, brings us back to the issue of silence, informing and the belief that “real” men do not snitch. And what of the authorities that actually found her body? Someone must have discovered the grisly evidence. And if not, and she was just thrown out as a part of the regular day’s “garbage,” then this is a searing indictment of how valueless black women’s bodies and lives become in the matrix of hegemonic masculinity. Magie’s vile murder therefore becomes a metaphor for how violent models of manhood eat up and spit out all who cross its path – especially women.

At the same time, it is important to remember the ironic and sad truth that some women also collude in the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity because they also buy into these constructions and see violent men as the most “real” and desirable men. Imani Tafari-Ama discovers this in her discussions with men and women in Southside, Kingston: “Some of the male youths in a group of ten . . . suggested that women do not respect men unless the men beat them” (257). And “Some women admire the ruthlessness of the *Shooter/Rude Boy* as a sign of sexual prowess. His penis/ gun power places him in the *desirable* category of being able to provide social protection and/or sexual satisfaction” (260, italics in original). These observations reveal a level of embedded acceptance of “real” manhood from men as well as women (and children) that complicate the disentanglement of this dominant way of being.

Luke

There are other impediments within the hegemonic masculine discourse as well. One such sticking point is the issue of revenge. Even as it affirms the image of being a man who takes control and stands up to all dangers, it complicates the unraveling of this mythic masculinity because it merely extends the cycle of violence and ultimately traps its perpetrators. As we know from the room full of police officers that Officer Roy murders on Christmas day in the novel *The Harder They Come*, revenge splashes in a wide arc and the victims can be varied. But instead of having legendary consequences that are retold in community stories, revenge creates genuine issues of safety that must be considered when discussing how to interrupt violent masculinity.

The experiences of one character in *Born Fi' Dead* makes this clear. Gunst introduces us to a young man named Luke who sells crack cocaine in one of the Brooklyn crack houses that Gunst frequently visits. While he sells drugs for his "living," he feels contradictory tension about the culture of drugs that he essentially contributes to. His military training in Jamaica makes him detest the random casualties that drive-by slayings often leave in their wake, but he still condones some forms of violence. As Gunst says, "he liked to think that, if the need ever arose, he would have the skill to kill whomever he was after and leave the innocent out of it" (179). It is interesting that he does not see how the "innocent" would also be affected by violence

aimed at the “guilty,” but in his mind there is a distinction. Gunst goes on to say,

Luke was a former “soldier in the Jamaica Defense Force in the late 1970s and had seen so much shooting in his Kingston neighborhood that nothing in Brooklyn fazed him. “*We’re all here to find a living,*” he said. “*Every mon must eat bread.* But is rough out there all the same” (178 – 179, emphasis added).

Luke’s words here echo the hard-working family-man sentiment of Biggs and Wayne in *Shottas* and leave readers with the impression that violence is an unfortunate but necessary choice for some men. It becomes the chosen way that some men counteract the reality of material lack and governmental neglect that many inner-city communities face, but many men do not make that choice. As noted with Luke’s idyllic separation of the innocent, if violence is all around, it still touches men’s lives even when they choose a path of *non-violence*. Luke explains to Gunst how even the police, who are supposed to protect citizens, become an arm of state-sanctioned terror:

“You don’t have to do anything for the cops in Jamaica to kill you,” he said. “I saw a friend of mine from Rema die one night. The cops shot him, but he didn’t die right away. So they threw him in the car trunk, and he knew they were gonna take him to some other place fi’ finish him off, so he was shouting, “Don’t let them put me in the trunk! Don’t let them put me in the car, ‘cause I don’t die yet!” But they carried him

off and then everybody start to run, from police station to police station, from hospital to hospital. And we didn't find nobody, until the morning came and we heard that he had died." (179 – 180)

This incident is connected to a long history of police brutality faced by communities of color around the globe. In this way, these Jamaican police officers are no different than officers who use excessive force in Los Angeles, New York or South Africa. However, Jamaica is different from other countries in terms of the widespread nature of its police brutality. Gary Younge reports in 2003 an alarming statistic: "According to Amnesty International, Jamaica has the highest number of police killings per capita in the *world*: an annual average of 140 civilians over the past 10 years in a population of 2.6m" (242, emphasis added). Moreover, a 2008 report in Ascribe News reveals that the police are "biased against the population, viewing the community as *undeserving of protection*" (1, emphasis added). Luke's retelling of his friend's death is part of the chilling reality that many Kingston residents consider the police to be as much of a problem as the so-called "criminals" that they are supposedly fighting. One victim's mother says, "'They're not fighting crime, they're making more crime. We don't have police, we have gunmen'" (243). However, Younge makes the point that there is ironically still public support *for* the police tactics because there is little faith in the judicial system (243). All of this means that community residents are

sandwiched in between guns from all sides. But what makes Luke's story useful in this moment, is his reaction to his friend's death:

Luke went into a downtown Kingston club a few weeks later and found the same policemen drinking there. He was about to throw a firebomb into the place when a friend dragged him away.

"So many things like those, it's hard for people to forget. And even if five or ten years go by, and the person who did that killing is not dead, you must do something. Because every time you see him, you remember your friend, or your brother, or whoever it was they killed. *It keeps riding you until you got to do something.*" (179 – 180, emphasis added)

Luke wants to extinguish his mental anguish with gun violence and this is perhaps one of the most damaging lessons from these violent constructions of masculinity. Like Ivan in the novel of *The Harder They Come*, Capone in *Third World Cop* and Biggs in *Shottas*, gun revenge is seen as the way to grieve appropriately. Remember Robert Arjet's point that guns become an emotional substitute with, "the power to cancel out grief, bind men together, and heal deep psychological wounds" (137). This robs men of the ability to seek healthy alternatives and develop the skills that are critical to their emotional well-being. Moreover, we can imagine that an individual man/boy might feel social pressure to choose the path of revenge, even if he does not want to, because it is supposedly what a "real" man would do. Of course this extends

the cycle of violence even further, but those realities feel irrelevant when trying to construct a *respected* male identity. As Tafari-Ama relates,

Gang feuds have been reinforced by feelings of 'blood for blood' revenge arising out of the human losses that families have suffered during the years of conflict. The syndrome of 'fire for fire' revenge is also fraught with gender power dynamics, since those who perceive that they have been injured, in turn lash out on those who they recognise [sic] to be weaker, due to lack of symbolically phallic gun weaponry and the authority this emblem connotes. (27)⁶

If non-violence is not respected, then it is hard to choose that path. The path of *least* resistance is ironically the path that creates the *most* damage. But again, if men (and boys) are in any way connected to or living around cycles of violence, they are at risk of being harmed even if they do not enact violence themselves.

Luke's story is a perfect example of this point. Although he does not act on *his* imagined revenge, Luke himself is the victim of another man's revenge. He is later shot because he owes his crack supplier two thousand dollars and had been in hiding. Gunst transcribes her last interview with him

⁶ "Blood for blood" and "fire for fire" are words from former JLP leader Edward Seaga's 1965 speech that many blame as one of the first sparks of Jamaica's political warfare: "The occasion was a ceremony at Kingston's National Heroes' Circle, where all of the party leaders had gathered to commemorate two men who had led the bitter Morant Bay rebellion of 1865. Alexander Bustamante and Norman Manley were there, both aging and ailing, and Seaga and Michael Manley were each only a few years away from becoming the leaders of their respective parties. Some youths in the crowd booed Seaga, and he faced them down with an open threat of war. 'If they think they are bad,' he shouted, 'I can bring the crowds of West Kingston. We can deal with you in any way at any time. It will be fire for fire, and blood for blood.'" (Gunst 84).

after Shenda tells her about his death. Gunst likens the experience to that of “hearing the voice of a ghost” (181). What is more eerie to us as readers, are Luke’s final words:

“I’m not thinking about sitting down up here and selling drugs for the rest of my life. *I try to get legal jobs but I don’t succeed.* And I have a woman and a baby to take care of down in Kingston. *Someday I’m going home.*” (181, emphasis added)

Luke clearly sees a different end to his life. What is more disappointing is that he says his attempts to find legal employment are all unsuccessful. He is trying to fill his male-provider role, but can only do so illegally. This is reminiscent of Ratty’s frustration in *Third World Cop*, (as well as Chevannes’s confirmation), of Kingston residents not being able to get a job because of their downtown address. It leaves us wondering exactly what obstacles Luke faced in filling out his job applications. It also begs the question of when did he imagine that he would be able to go home? He clearly understands the cycle of violent retribution, because he is in hiding. However, he is killed when he lets his guard down to go have a drink with a friend. This message is perhaps even more unsettling because it reinforces the idea that male vulnerability equals death. Therefore, men are constantly performing, masking, shielding and on guard in effort to keep this vulnerability far from public view. They tuck their true selves deep down inside of their chests,

behind multiple layers of what Linton Kwesi Johnson calls the “cool and deadly” (43). As Johnson says,

(it is a aad awt [hard art] fi mawstah yu know
dis smiling an skinin yu teet
wen yu awt [when your heart] swell-up soh till yu feel it a goh bus
wen yu cyan fine di rime fi fit di beat
wen yu cyan fine di ansah fi di puzzle complete)

Hegemonic masculinity leaves men without real answers for their life puzzles, without the right rhymes for their life beats. Most importantly, it leaves their hearts feeling like they are going to burst because they *feel* like they have no viable alternatives. Again, the Ramírez refrain: “Masculinity is very demanding” (59).

Trevor “Bones” Phillips

Despite the challenges for following a different path to manhood, many men do it successfully in Jamaica and beyond. Some men actively work for peace and try to guide other men and boys to do the same. One such figure in *Born Fi’ Dead* is Trevor Phillips. Having grown up in the McGregor Gully community in Kingston, he is familiar with (and a tangential part of) its associated PNP Gully posse that is run by Eric “Chinaman” Vassell.

However, as a peace activist trying to bring the two political sides together, he is also familiar with the rival JLP posses. As leader of Kingston’s Central Peace Council and general secretary of the PNP Youth Organization (an effort

to mobilize young men against violence and towards conscious socialism), he is instrumental in negotiating the 1978 peace truce that temporarily stemmed the tide of violence that had been washing over the island in the previous elections. As Dick Hebidge notes,

The level of political violence in the run-up to the 1976 elections got so high that the Prime Minister declared a State of Emergency. A Gun Court was set up in the centre of Kingston and a law was passed whereby anybody found carrying a gun could be immediately arrested and detained for an indefinite period...The situation only began to improve when Claudie Massop [of the JLP] and Buckie Marshall [of the PNP], the Rude Boy gunmen for the two political parties in Kingston's slums, signed a truce and decided to work together to improve local conditions...This move was started by Rastafarians. The shift from violent to peaceful solutions to Jamaica's problems was reflected in the next phase of the island's pop history – Reggae. (37, as quoted in Tafari-Ama)

Here we see that Rastafari beliefs become an important counter-balance to the destructive models of masculinity circulating in the politically motivated violence. Reggae is the most public face of Rastafari through the spread of its message with Bob Marley, the faith's most globally recognized member. As an institution based in love and peace for humanity, Rastafari presents many men (and women) with viable non-violent alternatives for constructing

identity and Trevor identifies himself as a Rasta. While a lot more can be said about the role of Rastafari and reggae music in constructing options for Jamaican masculinity, the images that seem to be most seductive are those that we see in films like *Shottas*, *Third World Cop* and *The Harder They Come*. We will return to the image of the Rasta man later in the conclusion, but for now, Trevor's story gives us an intimate look at someone straddling two worlds.

As a peace activist, he is in direct opposition to the drug selling and violence that Gully posse don Eric Vassell stands for and several Gully members encourage Trevor to kill Vassell. Trevor has the opportunity to do so one evening, but shows that something else other than violence informs his identity and rules his emotions. Trevor explains to Gunst what happened:

"I had a friend from the Gully named Rockers who came to me one night and told me that I'd better kill Chinaman before he killed me. We were in a little weed spot in Brooklyn, and when we came out, there was Chinaman standing by the door. Rockers said, 'There he is. Shoot him.' You could see Chinaman start shaking. I could see his knees buckle. And Rockers was clinging to me, whispering, 'Kill him! Kill him!' But *I couldn't get it in my heart to do it.*" . . . "*What I wanted was not what surrounded me in life,*" . . . "I don't know if it was my early education or what, but *I had developed a social conscience. I was around*

people who glorified killing, but I couldn't find the glory in it." (227,
emphasis added)

Trevor has the opportunity to be the "real" man as defined by the dominant norms, but he chooses to resist. It is interesting that in this moment, the infamous don is shaking with knees buckling. The big-time drug lord who orchestrates lavish "treats" for his community in Kingston and sends barrels full of guns to his supporters, is quaking with fear in the face of the very violence that he helps to perpetuate. However, Trevor cannot pull the trigger and instead chooses the path of peace. Yet it must not go unnoticed that there is a trigger to pull. Trevor stands for peace, but carries a gun. He wants a different life for himself, but understands the life that surrounds him – a life that often asks men to defend/prove themselves through the barrel of a gun. As a teen, he spends five years in Kingston's General Penitentiary after being arrested for allegedly robbing an uptown Kingston nightclub. Because he did not have the money for a lawyer to help him defend his innocence, he has no recourse and has to do the time (192). Gunst reports that, "he endured the same kind of punishment meted out to the character played by Jimmy Cliff in *The Harder They Come*. He was lashed to rum barrels and beaten with a cat-o'-nine-tails. But he had a chance encounter with Bob Marley during that time, a vivid moment of shared sufferation that strengthened Trevor's faith" (192). Trevor tells Gunst the story:

“Alan Cole, Bob’s manager, grew up with me in the Gully, . . . One day he and Bob came out to the beach at Port Henderson, where it happened that I was with a prison work crew chopping wood, and they saw me. I was ashamed, being there in prison clothes in front of Bob. But they made me feel like a brother. Skill [Bob’s manager] said, ‘Bwoy, *everybody out here fight for you, Bones.*’ And then he turned to Bob and told him I was the man who was sent to prison for something I didn’t do. And Bob was looking real pitiful, and I could see that he was feeling my pain.” (192)

Although he has to endure the pains of prison, the idea that people were fighting for him must have been a balm to Trevor’s teenage soul. This connects to the idea of community as a personal anchor and links to the importance of young men seeing themselves reflected in models of masculinity that they find positive. And in prison, he finds these role models through reading. Gunst frames Trevor’s words with a comment about how important books became during this time:

Although the General Penitentiary was hell, it was a hell with a library. “. . . And then someone gave me a book by Nelson Mandela, *No Easy Road to Freedom*. And that book really took me into my own life. . . . I saw how colonialism was the same everywhere, how these things all fit together. And I just started reading like mad. Like Eldridge Cleaver said, I read to save myself.” (192 – 193)

Because Trevor stands in a world riddled by violence, he is still affected by it. After coming to New York after the peace treaty, he eventually winds up back in prison for another five years for alleged possession of a gun that “had been used in a robbery at a [New York] reggae club” (188). Basil Wilson, a professor at John Jay College in New York and close friend of Trevor’s, mourns this wasteful cycle and offers Gunst a tentative explanation:

“Trevor is a ranking,” Basil said sadly. “He has been a ranking from mornin’, as they say, and he will never change. That is indelible. But he’s one of the most intelligent men I know. *Had he grown up somewhere other than McGregor Gully, there is no telling what he might have become. . .*” (189, emphasis added).

While working for peace, Trevor is simultaneously snagged in the web of violence. Basil Wilson describes Trevor’s socialization in McGregor Gully like a stain that will forever mark the fabric of his life. This outlook does not seem to leave room for much positive change. However, Trevor is still pulled in another direction.

What is more poignant than Wilson’s words, is Trevor’s interpretation of his own life when relaying the story of not shooting Eric Vassell. He admits to having a “social conscience” that is unswayed by the glorification of violence around him. This may seem difficult to believe in the face of multiple arrests and prison terms. But the criminal accusations do not ever seem to be of a violent nature. And Trevor still clings to the idea that he sees no use in

throwing more bodies into the killing fields. He claims not to know where to attribute its development, but we see that he credits the support of Bob Marley and his manager, as well as the models found in the life stories of Nelson Mandela and others. Moreover, Trevor recognizes the significance of having a social consciousness: "I was around people who glorified killing, but I couldn't find the glory in it" (227). Although he is both in and out of the penal system, the example of his not shooting Eric Vassell shows that Trevor is trying to fashion a different model of masculinity for himself. He seeks an identity that is grounded in the spirit of collective humanity and individual resilience. This is the kind of masculinity that does not take advantage of the weak, attach power to the ballistically strong or bend under the peer pressure of so-called friends. In the midst of all of his contradictions, he has an internal compass that is guided by resilience and it is this type of buoyancy that is key to creating healthy masculine identities. The major concern of this project rests on the twin question of how young men both preserve/protect that resilience and simultaneously nurture a social conscience.

Perhaps part of the answer lies in the act of being and telling. On the one hand, Trevor's very example in everyday life stands as a living testament to ways to find peace in the midst of terror. But his life also demonstrates the difficulties such a straddling poses in reality. First and foremost, a culture of violence is fuelled by a culture of silence. Perpetrators, victims and bystanders all honor the assumption of keeping crimes a secret, or suffer death

as an “informa” – remember the young Wayne at the beginning of *Shottas* shouting to the rest of his playmates, “Wait for me! Me shot the informa!” in their children’s game, and Ratty’s choice of death over being branded an informer. By virtue of telling Gunst the story of the inner workings of Vassell and the Gully posse, Trevor can theoretically be seen as a type of “informa” as well as a different kind of hero. If “real” men hold their emotions and inner feelings close to their chest, then speaking is itself an act of courage as well as defiance. It also challenges the hegemonic definitions of masculinity while still living at its margins.

Trevor hangs out with the Gully posse in New York and Gunst suspects that he is a lot more involved in their dealings than he reveals to her – especially since he had violated his parole in 1986 and “would be guaranteed another long stint in the system if the cops caught up with him now” (221). After Gully headquarters is raided in 1990 by the same New York SWAT team that rounded up Delroy Edwards and his crew, Trevor begins to worry:

The weeks after the Gully bust also threw Trevor into a terrifying personal quandary. For years he had dreamed of finding someone to tell his story, knowing that his own part in the posse saga was also a chapter in Jamacia’s untold story. Now, despite his friends’ insistence that I had to be a police informer, he had finally met someone he thought he could trust. But he was afraid for his life. As Courtney had

said about the Shower [a ruthless JLP-affiliated gang], there was no way out of a posse – “Ain’t no leaving but to die.” (221)

The police eventually do catch up with Trevor and ironically through the very models of masculinity that he struggles against. After hiding in Miami, Trevor is back in New York in the winter of 1993. He gets into an argument with his girlfriend and pulls a gun out at her during their fight. She calls the police and he is arrested. “When they ran his name through their computer, they saw that he was on parole but had not been to see his officer in seven years” (233). He is sentenced to a year in prison and faces subsequent deportation. In one of his last letters to Gunst, Trevor writes to her from prison:

*If you know as many people as I do who have died from the violence attendant to the Jamaican experience, with gang-related political rivalries and the drug-posse evolution of the gangs, as well as the assortment of posses now in vogue across the urban United States...and if you know that, due to the failure of society to overcome racism and **make solid changes in the images being projected (to the youths most of all)**, most of these posses are now made up of Blacks, Hispanics, and Whites who are born citizens of this country and cannot be deported anywhere. Then maybe you will come to understand why “me haffi’ cry fi de youths,” as [Jamaican dancehall star] SuperCat puts it in one of his raps.*

*When a don dies or goes to prison for a long sentence, the hungry youths – **hungry for the image and the power**, if not just for food – always move into position (though they know the risks and the odds) to take their place as the band plays on.*

Since the more fortunate members of society have ways and means to insulate themselves from the general violence, we daily have to live with it. I want to be sure that you really understand us. When you have to go to sleep and wake up to the body counts, you will have experienced our reality – when the count invariably includes a family member or friend. Someone who could have gone to college and earned a degree, instead of “Jungle” or “Tivoli” or “the crackhouse” or “the spot.” (234 – 235, italics in original, bold added)

Trevor’s letter raises the issue that complicates any potential solutions to the problem of violent masculinity. Class differences mediate the effects that violence has on one’s life. Socioeconomic status can either act as a buffer against violence for the privileged or create an open funnel toward violence for the poor. As Barry Chevannes notes, the expectations of manhood do not recede in the face of economic lack. To that end, many young men try to fulfill their prescribed role as provider and their constructed role as tough guy through allegiance to the various posses. As Trevor points out, this phenomenon is not limited to Jamaica. Being “hungry for the image and the power” has no geographic boundaries. Instead, the quest for image and power leave only trails of despair that have lasting consequences on the lives

involved. At the end of his letter, Trevor concludes with a warning to Gunst that I feel is relevant to this project as well: “Remember that, no matter how much you empathize with us or try to ‘research’ us – to us belong the sorrow of being trapped in this cruel experience. Only our hearts feel the pain” (235).

Trevor unsuccessfully sues the city of New York for illegal deportation, and is sent back to Jamaica in 1997 close to fifty years old. In a letter addressed to Trevor, Gunst tells the reader how things in Jamaica had changed:

The younger dons were running things now and they weren’t too pleased when you showed up – a relic from the Manley years, a reminder of the time before crack-cocaine and posseism, when some young men from the ghetto had socialist dreams and thought that maybe even a sufferer could make a political difference. So they didn’t welcome you back. And at first you were afraid for your life.

There was one activist you especially dreaded, because the two of you had been allies in the 1970s and *you had told me details about the murders he had committed*. Now he was back home again from a long exile, running things in McGregor Gully. (249, emphasis added)

He breaks the code of silence and is legitimately afraid. But eventually Trevor settles into a groove and begins working with the youth like he used to do in his younger organizing days. He speaks to Gunst and relays that “Everything is cool” (249), inviting Gunst down for the Sunsplash music festival and

arranging with his girlfriend when she would come with their daughter.

Gunst goes on to describe that the fear was gone from his voice: “you sounded calm, like a runner who knew he’d trained for this race” (249). But Trevor is sadly murdered two weeks after their conversation and Gunst’s letter is written to him in memoriam (as an Afterword to a new edition of the book). He is shot twice in the back of the head and his girlfriend reports that his body showed signs of torture: “there were burns on your body and your locks has [sic] been yanked out by the roots” (250). Like Luke, Trevor is killed when he lets his guard down. More importantly, he is killed for talking, for breaking the silence. He recognized the risks and would insist that Gunst never use the term “informant” while gathering her research:

Trevor despised the word ‘informant’ because it sounded so much like ‘informer’. “Don’t call me that,” he would say, when I was at a loss for how else to describe his role in the book. Soon I came to understand that uptown, among the ‘educated’, the word is just a harmless scrap of social-science jargon but downtown it is a killing offence. (254)

Trevor’s horrible end proves this to be true. Even an old prison friend of Trevor’s remarks on how dons like Vassell can still garner significant power from inside of jail as from outside: “it was no big thing to order a hit from jail” (251). And because of that power, Trevor’s old friend is confused as to why Trevor would talk to Gunst in the first place:

“Bwoy, Bones haffi’ know him cyan’ get by with them t’ing . . . Him mus’ know what him do when him collaborate with you ‘pon that book. That is like him was an informer, you no see it? Is like him cross the line into some kinda’ no man’s land, when him give you all those information fi’ the book. Cyan’ have it both ways. You either on one side or the other.” (251 – 252)

Like Wesley in *For Nothing At All*, there is no such thing as neutrality; violence forces men to choose a side and quite often, it is the side paired with death. But even though he essentially calls Trevor’s truth-telling an act of suicide, Trevor’s friend still has a level of respect for his decision: “. . . Trevor’s friend whistled softly into the phone. ‘I not sayin’ Chinaman was right,’ he said. ‘And I not sayin’ Bones was wrong neither. But bwoy...some crazy kind o’ courage that man ‘ave’” (252). Perhaps this type of toughness will be constructed into what “real” men are made of. As Gunst herself asks, “if we cannot expose tribalism for what it is without risking the lives of the men and women who are its daily witnesses and victims, then what is to be done? What hope is there for Jamaica” (253)?

I do not agree with attaching the notion of “tribalism” to Jamaica and other countries labeled as “Third World.” I think it reeks too much of the threatening, savage Other rhetoric that Patricia Hill Collins describes (when it is applied to South Africa) as a racialized frame of violence that ignores the political or economic dimensions of whatever conflict (164 – 165). However, I

do agree with Gunst's question about the urgency of talking and the power of the voice. As Tafari-Ama says, ". . . the systematic process of silencing suggests that claiming access to voice is the counter-discourse that the oppressed and exploited have to employ in coming to consciousness" (207). Therefore, in recognition of letting those voices speak for themselves (as much as they can in a mediated text), the last section is dedicated to the stories of those still alive to relay their sorrows and their triumphs.

The Despair

Conroy

Conroy Green is one of several Renkers posse men that help New York City prosecutors in their case against Delroy "Uzi" Edwards in 1980, in exchange for shorter sentences. Green is one of Gunst's key informants and she visits him in jail several times. During these visits, he candidly shares what it was like growing up in Kingston's Dunkirk neighborhood and then later in the U.S. as a teenager. His reflections capture the connection between violence and Jamaican masculinity so often seen on movie screens and Gunst says that Green was clear about the relationship between violence and the movies: "He thought that even though the movies didn't necessarily engender the violence, they framed it; they gave it style" (9). He goes on to describe how the socialization of film touched his life as a young man:

“To an outsider, it might look like, ‘Damn, these guys are mean!’
But being from Jamaica, you see it growing up, you see it all your life.
Even before I killed somebody, I felt like I killed before. I think maybe
Hollywood had a part in the rude-boy thing, with the movies they put
out, like certain westerns. Jamaicans act out a lot of that stuff, want to
be tough like outlaws. . . .” (9, emphasis added)

His honesty reveals the validity of critics’ concerns over the connection
between violent film images and actual violence. One cannot help but think
back to the colossal-sized Ivan on the screen with two guns drawn at his side,
filling the frame with his showdown stance, or to how he jumps and twirls in
the gunslinger photos that he has taken of himself. He is practicing these
moves, rehearsing the performance. But the repetition of that sequence also
acts as an aid to the viewer – an act of rehearsal in the male viewer’s mind of
how he would jump, twirl and draw in the same gunslinger fashion.
Remember Skin ducking and rolling by the river with his borrowed gun in
For Nothing at All and how his practiced moves impress Wesley. Those same
moves, and the subsequent firing lesson, incidentally help Wesley later on
when he needs to pull the trigger in self-defense. And then think about the
childhood game that Biggs and Wayne play in Waterhouse with their
wooden guns at the beginning of *Shottas*. All of them go through the motions
of inherited imitation, and most of them aspire to put these borrowed moves

into deadly action. As Conroy says, the regularity of the violence that punctuates his early life creates a warped desensitization:

“When I shot at people, I felt like I did it before. It wasn’t like I was trembling and asking, What is this I’m doing? *It was like I was into it all along.* And I think that’s just from social settings, from growing up around all that violence, the way Jamaica was with politics. The way it was when I was just a youth comin’ up. And once you get up to New York, you find that being affiliated with Jamaican politics, you get stronger because of the reputation it carries. *People respect you more* and don’t mess with your territory.” (167, emphasis added)

For Conroy, there is no separation between fantasy and reality. His actual life feels like the battle scenes from a western or gangster movie, while the movies become his training ground because they present heroic scenes of glorified violence that he wants to incorporate into his life. Moreover, he adds the crucial ingredients for hegemonic masculine identity of reputation and respect. For him, the legacy of being a savage black brute works in his favor and he acknowledges that violent Jamaican masculinity is seen as a transnational infection, something very different and more potent than the black male violence already on U.S. shores. But this reputation comes from having to eek out a life in between blood, bullets and bodies (to borrow Tafari-Ama’s title), and coping with the regularized terror is simply unacceptable.

As Imani Tafari-Ama says, “No human being should have to suffer the indignities that are commonplace in the urban grassroots communities of Jamaica [or any besieged community]. And although, harsh experiences mark . . . residents as remarkably resilient, this very capacity reinforces their *de facto* designation as marginalised [sic] *others*” (340, italics in original). In this way, the black bodies suffering at the hands of the terror in Jamaica become just as disposable as Magie’s body that was thrown off of the roof in a plastic bag. The posse members that make it to New York are seen as the uncontrollable offspring of the black brute who crept across U.S. borders in the form of Biggs in *Shottas*. But the insignificance of black lives manifests itself in peculiar ways on U.S. shores. According to Conroy, the self-destructive nature of crack addiction was not a concern to New York police:

“You know,” Conroy said as a parting thought, “the police wouldn’t have bothered with us so much if it wasn’t for the murders we did.

They have this big charade ‘bout the war on drugs, but it’s only that – a charade.” (167)

He hypothesizes that the police would have let them all smoke themselves to death. Killing oneself with crack is all right, but wielding the symbol of brute male strength is not. His theory solidifies the need to control the menacing brute when he becomes a perceived threat to the larger (U.S.) community. Conroy is behind bars and temporarily off of the street, but as Trevor reminds us in one of his final letters, there will always be a new man-child to step into

the empty hole left by a fallen man; the cycle seems to forever continue: “. . . the hungry youths – *hungry for the image and the power*, . . . always move into position (*though they know the risks and the odds*) to take their place as the band plays on” (235, emphasis added). The costs for becoming a “real” man are high but many young men rationalize the risks with the perceived benefit of respect and reputation, their false bravado goaded on by Bogart’s chorus from the novel of *The Harder They Come*: “Live fast, die young, have a good-looking corpse” (202).

Courtney and Nines

Courtney and Nines represent this “Live fast” philosophy in action, but at opposite ends of the spectrum. Courtney is a young Jamaican man trying to build his reputation in New York, while Nines is an older Jamaican man in New York who has grown weary of the cycles of violence that he has witnessed over the years from Kingston to Brooklyn. Their respective stories add an important element to the tale of how male identity is created in Jamaica.

Gunst describes Courtney as a “gun hawk for the Shower posse, a small-time dealer of stolen weapons and drugs” (202). He leaves Jamaica as a teenager and moves to West Virginia on an apple-picking contract. He knows several Jamaicans in New York that run with the JLP Shower posse, and they

encourage him to break his contract and come to Brooklyn, which he does (204). He works for Delroy Edwards for a short time and describes the Renkers posse don as a “savage” (202). To prove his point he asks Gunst, Shenda and Shenda’s landlord, ““You remember that body they found over on Rogers, with a bullet in his head and his two balls stuffed in his mouth?” . . . ‘That was one of Delroy’s. Savagism’” (202). But in the next breath Courtney admits his *own* willingness to kill:

“When you have a name as a gun hawk – somebody who is well into the business and don’t fear police, detectives, whoever comes upon you – then you get to move with anybody you want to. You move under the ground. I have certain people who I am like a son to, because they can rely on me. If they give me a gun and say, ‘Go out there and kill that mon,’ I would do it. **I wouldn’t feel nothin’ ‘bout doin’ that. I’d kill a person in a quick second if the money was good.**” . . .

“**For a mon to kill a mon, it feel good,**” he went on. “You understand? ‘Cause when you kill a mon, you get...you get *hot*.” He said the word in a breathy stage whisper. “You get *bold*. You all right when you kill a mon, ‘cause you got it made.” (203, italics in original, bold added)

Courtney rationalizes his own savagery as nothing more than a business transaction. The idea that his killing is somehow more humane because he

does not mutilate the body is illogical and contradictory. But what is most interesting about Courtney is that he seems to recognize his own contradictions and the larger political context of corruption, while simultaneously being trapped by both of them:

“I just consider myself as one young man, confused in this society by the way my leaders made me. . . .Jamaica don’t have no right leader. It’s just ‘You is PNP, me is Labourite. You bring down gun, me bring down gun, and we kill one another’” . . .

“So I consider myself as a young man who is trying to get something out of life, any which way I can. But I see that I can’t really do that in Jamaica or here. In Jamaica it’s because of the way the leaders make things. They give all the money to the war people and stir up everyone’s mind. But you see, we are still in slavery inna we own country. And you know who puts us under slavery? Our own, that’s who. Not the white man, but our own ras-clot kind. JLP, PNP – all o’ dem is one. They are all pure gangsters now.” (205)

While he blames the government for their role in creating the violent fractures in inner-city communities, he does not take on equal responsibility for his role in making things worse. He somehow stands outside of the circle of the “our own” that he claims enslave black people in their own country. Instead, he paints himself a victim of circumstance, an agent without power, and regular

guy just trying to make a decent living. But Tafari-Ama reminds us that the blame cannot be one-sided:

While we recognise [sic] that the men responsible for perpetrating the discourse of violence are desperately searching for ways to validate their personhood in the face of chronic social exclusions, they also have to be held accountable for visiting a high level of viciousness on their perceived enemies. Therefore, while one can justifiably attribute blame to the political manipulators, one cannot ignore the fact that the young men who choose to partake in the hegemonic enterprise, albeit from limited options, are still responsible for their own actions and therefore have to be held accountable. (355)

At some point, Courtney has to recognize his culpability but it is clouded by phony nationalistic jargon. While driving through the Brooklyn neighborhood with Gunst and Shenda he says, ". . . 'This is my world. I know how to struggle and I know how to survive. The only thing you haffi' understand about Jamaicans is that we no 'fraid of nothing. We think we cyan' dead. We have nine lives, like a cat'" (206). But Shenda challenges in disgusted impatience: "'What you mean, . . . 'struggle and survive'? How black people goin' to survive if them all the while kill one another? How that supposed to raise up we people?" (207). She recognizes the very point that Tafari-Ama does, but Courtney shouts back:

“The black race will never rise!” . . . “Never! Because black people is out to get what’s theirs. If white people like the Jews can still move good with one another, it’s only because they not livin’ by the drugs bizness, and that is where black people find themselves now in this ras-clot country. Is a tightrope we walk all the time. . . .

“The fighting will never stop, . . . *I don’t really understand what all the fighting is for neither, but I know that it will never end.* Because if I have a son, I’m going to grow him up under one condition. Me will tell him, ‘Star you is a Shower mon. You haffi’ do what your general says.’ Me will grow him up and sometimes kick him down. You understand? *Do him some cruel thing just to make him get tough, to make him get cruel.* Like how Delroy kill his own father.”

Courtney didn’t stop to consider the patricidal implications of this child-rearing theory. It was getting late and he had to go pick up his *daughter* at school. (207, emphasis added)

Courtney is still a young man and he clearly has not fully developed all of the tools he needs to for positive resilience. He creeps up to the edge of a magnificent breakthrough about masculinity and violence and then undermines it with self-defeating nonsense. On the one hand, he admits that he does not understand what the fighting is for, but on the other hand he does not connect how passing on that same confused allegiance to an unborn

imaginary son will only perpetuate the fighting and guarantee that “the black race will never rise.”

Interestingly or perhaps predictably, when Gunst meets Courtney on her own in the seclusion of Central Park he is a different person: “In the park, free from his need to keep the bravura mask that he always wore in Brooklyn, Courtney would hum some of the rap songs he had written. They were about violence, and they did not sing its praises” (209). His lyrics point out the contradictions that he himself embodies: “‘The chains are off my feet, still my mind is in captivity. I don’t know when black people will wake up and see that the chains are gone, but our minds are gone also’” (210). It is as if Courtney *wants* to save himself, but does not know quite how to do so. He needs the guidance and public approval to seek an alternative model of masculinity. It is the desire for public approval, respect and reputation that forces him to wear the “bravura mask” when he is in Brooklyn. However, during these more private moments we get to see that Courtney understands a lot more than he originally lets on. When Gunst asks him what he thinks about the links between violence and the movies, he answers excitedly:

“Is like these movies hype pure badness,” he answered. “I see since *Scarface* come out in the seventies how every one o’ we want to play Scarface! Certain movies seem to turn people wicked same time. Things like *Scarface*, *Rambo*, *The Godfather* mean something very different in the ghetto. Is like white people can watch them film and

not run killer same time, but in the ghetto we see so much killin' that the films are like real life.

"Me remember one time me was watching *Scarface* with my lickle crew and the whole o' we wanted to be just like him, wanted big dollars, and is big-big we a' think. We wan to go rob mon and take away all his cocaine . . . Snort up nuff-nuff cocaine and get well-paranoid and go catch nuff-nuff girls and shoot up a club full o' people. *Then we would run things! Every mon goin' to hear 'bout our syndicate. . . . Just like Scarface. But a pity we nah know that all o' we would get dead.*" (210 – 211, emphasis added)

Courtney is still young, but he does see the dead-end road that hegemonic masculinity offers its suitors. Like Luke, he envisions a different life for himself but is trapped by the shotta code:

" . . . When you want to back off, it's too late. You haffi' stay steady, stand firm, and not leave your headquarters till death do you part. Is like a marriage certificate you sign. If you leave, you know too much and a nex' mon goin' to kill you. That is part of a syndicate. Ain't no leavin' but to die." (213)

Suddenly Courtney no longer seems like such a young man. His experiences seem far too heavy for his years and he is internally burdened by how to find a healthy life outside of posse struggles. Perhaps this is a product of his connection to an older man named Nines.

Nines hears about Gunst and her project through Courtney and wants to meet her to share his story. Courtney explains to Gunst that Nines has been in the gun business for years, stretching back to his days in Kingston. He has been shot thirty-six times and is currently hiding from his *own* drug-dealer son who wants to kill him (most likely as a result of child-rearing practices that Courtney described earlier). However, now that Nines sees “them is pushin’ up the licklest youth to run things” (212), he wants no more to do with it all but cannot get out. Before he can talk to Gunst, an acquaintance of Courtney overhears their plan to meet and reports that Nines is going to essentially “turn informa.” Predictably, someone kills Nines before he can physically talk, but it is four days after he writes a letter to Gunst. Like Trevor who feels the walls of the masculinity box closing in on him and puts pen to paper, Nines breaks the script by using letter-writing as a way to give testimony.

In this way, both Trevor and Nines are ironically linked to a tradition of slave narratives where the black body that is seen as bestial uses writing to capture and restore its humanity, and simultaneously reveal the hidden vagaries of the peculiar institution that enslaves them. Because someone tries to kill Courtney for talking as well, he puts his wife and daughter on a bus to join her parents in Chicago. Nines’s death and the attempt on his life underscore the brutal truth of the shotta code and like a slave running for freedom, Courtney plots his own escape. He meets Gunst in Central Park one

last time to deliver Nines's letter before his own flight to Chicago. The feelings of being trapped jump off of the pages of Nines's letter as he describes his experiences growing up in Trenchtown with don Tony Welch and their PNP Concrete Jungle crew:

I remember the days when Tony Welch and the Jungleites was trying to teach us that we must love one another and defend our areas. . . . But the love we were spreading was a bloody love. Killing our own people for foolishness. At the time I didn't realize what I was doing. I was much too deep into it to get out, so I just kept on killing. . . . There is innocent blood shedding down in Kingston. Ladies are dying, families are suffering, and the leaders are laughing, giving youth and youth guns and drugs to fight against their own brothers and sisters. Courtney is trying to get out of badness, I wish him the best of luck. . . . One love Jah Rastafari 9.s. (213 – 214, italics in original)

Eventually Nines is able to see the futility of building an identity around violence, but it is unfortunately too late for him. Perhaps through his example Courtney is set on a path to different options. He does call Gunst from Chicago to tell her that he made it safely. But since Gunst never sees him again, we can only hope that he is able to find different opportunities.

Brambles

We know that Brambles is the primary reason that Gunst is able to penetrate the inner-city Kingston communities and in so doing, he becomes

one of her closest friends and a primary character in the book. After living in Jamaica for two years, she moves back to New York and then returns to Jamaica to visit Brambles one summer. During this trip, she discovers a much different person than the friend she had left:

Brambles was poorer than ever; the Jamaican Information Service wasn't giving him assignments anymore, and he wondered if this was because he had associations there with the [Michael] Manley years. [Prime Minister Edward] Seaga's press corps was full of new faces: American-trained media experts who were skilled at public relations and knew how to hype the economic "miracle" that Seaga was working on the island. Brambles was a different breed of photojournalist.

Without a steady income and with two children to support, he talked that summer about leaving Kingston and finding work in the States. He didn't want to join his brother, a drug dealer in South Florida; he wanted to try New York. "There's nothing for me here on the Rock," he said. "Mek I go a' foreign like everyone else with any sense." (144 - 145)

So Brambles leaves and comes to New York one cold December. But after toiling twelve-hour days in a "Madison Avenue graphics sweatshop that ran on the labor of Caribbean illegals . . . for a hundred dollars a week," both his blood pressure and back pains steadily increase (146). He also spends season

after season in a cycle of incessant bronchitis. After being denied an expected raise, the should-know-better Brambles decides to sell crack for a friend who needs him to take the “evening shift” at his crack house (155). Although not on a street corner, Brambles’s “job” is to stay awake throughout the night answering the calls of various customers:

The steel door to the hallway started pounding with a buyer’s knocks; Brambles slipped the vial out and took the money in through a peephole. He said business was good – the place sometimes made as much as one thousand dollars a day – but of course none of this was his to keep. [His friend] Rockeye paid him when he felt like it, maybe ten or twenty dollars for a night’s work. Brambles hated what he was doing.

“I haffi’ bleach now [stay up all night] like a crackhead,” he grumbled. “An’ then they thank me, so mannerly-like, when I sell them this poison.” (156)

He recognizes it as poison yet still participates in its distribution – and not for very much money either! *Years* go by and unfortunately Brambles is *still* there:

He was caught in the catch-22 of a Jamaican sufferer lost in the promised land: the unwritten cultural law that says, *If you can’t come back from America with your pockets full, then don’t come back at all.* Jamaicans assume that anyone with the right stuff will come home

rich, and any other scenario is so humiliating that it is unthinkable. So Brambles stayed doggedly on, sending his meager earnings home to his son and daughter and freezing through one winter after another. (201, emphasis added)

As Barry Chevannes notes, the expectations of being the provider force many men to make choices that they are not proud of. This is particularly tough in countries such as Jamaica with high rates of male unemployment. Chevannes points out that, “although not nearly as high as female unemployment, [male unemployment] nonetheless has a greater social cost in terms of criminal activity and social disorder” (222). Brambles falls into the nether-space of not quite trying to be the “real” man in a publicly violent way, but he is still subject to living up to the societal norms of “real” masculinity. Recall Chevannes’s confirmation cited earlier in this project that for many Jamaicans, “men who do not hustle for their families are stigmatized by their community as *wotlis* [worthless]. In these communities, the survival ethos trips in as rationalization for whatever actions, by hook or by crook, a man deems necessary to meet personal and social obligations” (223). Keith Nurse posits that finances are inextricably linked to manhood:

Men’s masculinity and perception of self-worth is most often defined in terms of their work and their ability to be providers for their family. Male breadwinners are portrayed as *real men*. Patriarchy encourages men to pride themselves on the “hard work and personal sacrifice they

are making to be breadwinners for their families” (Pleck 1995, 11). It also trains men to “accept payment for work in feelings of masculinity rather than in feelings of satisfaction”, consequently “men accept unemployment as their personal failing as males”. The social construction of the male breadwinner role is therefore an important mechanism by which men are ensnared into their own oppression. And because it is mythologized – taken out of historical context and made natural and eternal – it becomes an invisible force, especially to men. (15, italics in original).

With two teenagers back in Jamaica, Brambles’s manhood and pride depend on the few dollars that he can scrape together from whatever source. Moreover, Brambles has the double burden of being a man “a’ foreign.” Like Wayne and Biggs, he needs to prove that he can “make it” abroad – whether “by de hook or by de crook” as Ratty also says. Therefore this invisible, but very real, myth of the male breadwinner pressures him (and many other men) to keep jobs despite their adverse conditions – a role that he would not endure if he was in a position of economic viability. Actually, these informal/illegal sectors of work that lay just outside the margins of the global labor market often supply a great deal of the remittances that are sent back to the Caribbean – consider Eric Vassell’s barrels full of goods for his Easter “treats” in McGregor Gully. Or better yet, let us briefly look at Claudie

Massop, Edward Seaga's JLP enforcer from the 1970s who held legendary status in his garrison community of Tivoli Gardens.

Massop was one of the dons who honored the gang truce after the 1977 Green Bay Massacre⁷ revealed how expendable they all were to the politicians: "jail taught them their commonality" (94). But police executed an unarmed Massop in February 1979 and his death rocked the island:

Thousands of sufferers lined up to view his body at the funeral home where he lay in state, and mourners, many of them women, wept in the street for the gunman they saw as a Robin Hood; one woman remembered the Christmas season a few months before, when Massop spent more than one thousand dollars to buy shoes for people in Tivoli. The PNP rankings in *Concrete Jungle* stood at attention as his funeral procession passed by.

The *Gleaner's* Wilmot Perkins, no admirer of outlaws, was nevertheless moved to write a eulogy for the slain gunman: "Massop is part of the legend of the Wild West. He was by all accounts a pretty rough customer. . . . He survived to become, in the tradition of Wyatt Earp, Doc Holliday, and Wild Bill Hickock, a gunslinger putting his sinister skills and reputation at the service of peace." (108)

⁷ On January 5, 1978 special military forces of the Jamaican government lured ten unemployed gunmen from the Southside community in Kingston, Jamaica to a firing range by the sea known as Green Bay with the promise of work and weapons. Early that morning, soldiers picked up the men in a van and dropped them on the beach with instructions to huddle around the promised ammunition, after which hidden snipers fired into the group. Five men died and five survived after fleeing, but no government officials were ever brought to trial despite the discovery that the military's original claim that the men ambushed the soldiers was false. (Gunst, Tafari-Ama)

Massop is definitely a community hero despite his gunman tactics. But Brambles's meager existence challenges the flashy images of glittery drug dealers living million-dollar lifestyles like Biggs, Wayne or even Wonie (the don from *Third World Cop*). Either way, each man represents the pressures to prove manhood, although at very different ends of the economic spectrum. What lies in common between them, however, is the yawning gap of economic deprivation that needs to be filled for inner-city residents who lack sufficient resources and services.

Economic deprivation allows political leaders to position gunmen to enforce their political agendas when election time comes and it allows those same gunmen to wreak havoc in inner-city communities. One of Brambles's friends explains to Gunst, "You may be surprised by how much politics means to us in the ghetto, but the reason is because *we know that if our party loses, we will starve*" (66, emphasis added). Economic deprivation also allows the government to ignore the widespread police abuse of its inner-city citizens. Even with this awareness, the violence does not make comfortable sense to outsiders (or most residents), and Gunst loses her cool during one interview. Brambles takes her to speak to an elder named Custom, who was a close friend of the Robin Hood hero, Claudie Massop. She hopes to hear something more "noble" about Massop's life, but emotionally crumbles after listening to Custom's endless stories about the numbers of people that Massop killed to get to his rank of neighborhood don:

I was shouting about not wanting to hear any more stories of sufferers who got big by killing one another. Didn't these men see that this was nothing to be proud of?

Brambles and Custom sat like statues. Custom finished his beer, got up slowly, and sauntered off into the west, back to Tivoli. Brambles was too angry to say anything. . . . We walked through the streets without saying a word, but when we reached his yard he took my tape recorder and turned it on.

"Orientating statements," he said, speaking into the microphone. . . . Instead of speaking in patois, he used the painstaking English he'd learned as a schoolboy, . . . Brambles loved words for their power, and that night he wanted me to feel it.

"To enter into the study of this ghetto society requires a certain kind of courage," he began. "It is an enormously variegated and complex subject. Those willing to take on the task must have an active, energetic mind capable of putting together seemingly infinite numbers of observations and events into something approaching a meaningful whole. . . . All previous preconceptions and biases must be eliminated.

"I have seen the incipience of intellectual arrogance in you, and sometimes you question the credibility of events. You are entering a new experience. You are writing something unique. You are white. It is difficult for a white person to simulate a black experience. And it is

even more difficult to express or interpret something you have never experienced before. Be calm.

“The people in the ghetto are not the masters of their own destiny. *People can use them because they don’t have any money or security. They are not surrounded by the amenities they require. They are anxious. It is for these reasons why they are so susceptible to all these kinds of exploitation.*

“You take things for granted, for to a certain extent you are very pampered. But these people who you talk to are professors in their own right. And regardless of your education, you could not survive one week in this ghetto without prostituting yourself. *These people don’t get any protection. They are strong. They are resilient. They are only the victims of circumstance.* They are the professors of poverty, and the pawns in the game of power politics.” (127 – 128, emphasis added)

The construction of violent Jamaican maleness cannot be divorced from these realities. It is easy to say, “stop the violence” when standing in the sheltered place of adequate food, clothing and shelter like Gunst and myself. Privilege will definitely affect the interpretation of any situation and this is actually the first time that Gunst’s whiteness is explicitly named (an issue we will revisit later). In the meantime, what is most instructive about Brambles’s treatise is his calling attention to how susceptible inner-city residents are to exploitation. In the face of exploitation, it is much easier to imagine the manipulation of young men and boys into fashioning identities around the

hegemonic models of masculinity that seemingly offer protection, honor and respect.

One young Jamaican drug dealer (ironically named “Jamaican *Wayne*” Bennett) living in DC before his arrest for multiple charges in 1989 explains the code of conduct that young men are expected to live by on the streets, as well as in prison. Leon Dash, *The Washington Post* reporter he speaks to at the time, summarizes the gendered instructions: “Never back down, even from what appears to be a trivial confrontation. Be willing to kill or die to defend your honor. Protect your reputation and manhood at all costs, lest you lose the respect of your friends” (p.1, 1989). Jamaican Wayne admits that when he was 12, he looked up to his 18 year-old brother who had a gun. Although he never saw him use it, its presence was enough for the youngster: “‘He looked so powerful,’ Bennett said. ‘Like he had power” (p.2, 1989). And in that same year Bennett meets a 14-year old, Raymond A. Taylor, who becomes his role model. Dash reports:

Taylor had “a big name on the street,” Bennett said. He was a “soldier” – someone who never backed down and *who commanded the respect of others*. “I wanted to fit in with the crowd {Taylor’s crowd} with the big name,” Bennett said. “They liked to fight. They don’t take no {expletive}. {These are} the guys that get all the girls.” (p.2, 1989, emphasis added)

I put Bennett's story alongside Brambles's and the other stories in Gunst's collection because it plainly demonstrates how easily young men become "pawns in the game of power politics." All around Bennett, Luke, Trevor, Courtney and Brambles, ideal masculinity is paired with images that symbolize supreme power. These images are reinforced from popular culture to state icons and neighborhood dons and each man in some way struggles to forge his way through the thicket of limited options. Gunst's book is useful for chronicling some of these struggles, but it also sets up a dynamic of consumption that indirectly contributes to preserving the legacy of the black brute.

White Privilege

After Brambles gives Gunst her "orientating statements," he later adds that, "'You are not here to say who is good and who is bad,' . . . 'You should only be committed to reality'" (129). The reality that she reports is an endless array of violent deeds. As Mimi Sheller contends, "As in the days of slavery, we are again beset with stories of people having their skin flayed off by acid, bodies slashed to pieces, babies torn from their mother's wombs. The gunman and gangsters have become one of the most violent incarnations of savage violence against innocent victims, and the Northern consumer continues to be 'infected' by the disease of decadent intercourse with dangerous others" (171). This position as insider-outsider/ethnographic reporter/participant

observer puts Gunst in an odd place. She is able to get inside information with the help of black people, but she never identifies herself as white until six pages before the end of the *Afterword* that is dedicated to Trevor and added to the 1998 edition – three years after the original 1995 publication. This means that all throughout the text she calls herself things like “this foreign woman” (22) or “American” (47), but notices her “brown-skinned Jamaican” friend who she also describes as “café-au-lait” in a conversation she is having about the race and class divisions on the island. She describes Brambles as a “tobacco-brown photographer” (50) and asks about the “white woman” in a mural on a rumshop wall of the American federal agent dubbed the “Iron Maiden” (52). She notices that Brambles’s nine-year old daughter Natalie is “an almond-eyed beauty, [and] much darker than Brambles and conscious, he said, of the difference in their skin” (60), and how the uptowners who come for the weekly street dance in Raetown are “unmindful of color and caste, next to the sufferers” for the few hours that they dare venture downtown. She critiques Harvard University’s “unquestioned privilege and power” that she claims alienates her in the midst of a History Department party during her graduate school career (16), as well as the return of beauty pageants to Jamaica in the 1980s that “invariably favored women with light skin and white features” (37). She discusses how former Prime Minister Norman Manley crossed caste and color lines in his political alliance with “‘Quashee’ – the African name that stands for the very black

and poor" (67) and how Alexander Bustamante's light skin gave him "a definite advantage [during his political campaign in the 1930s] in a colony where blackness was no virtue" (68). She goes on and on and on with no real naming of her *own* racial identity or white privilege and that absence, in the midst of all of this other racialized naming, feels disingenuous. She clearly positions herself as an ally, but it comes off as haughty phoniness in moments such as this one when she describes the island's tourist industry during the 1960s:

Tourism was even more socially corrosive. It brought seasonal, low-paying jobs to a few people who lived in the small towns on the north coast, and this work came with a wicked, atavistic fantasy: the Jamaica Tourist Board wanted white visitors to the island as the Old South of *Gone With the Wind*. "You can rent a lovely life in Jamaica," cooed one tourist board advertisement. "Rent-a-villas, rent-a-cooks, rent-a-maids, rent-a-nannies, rent-a-gardeners. It starts with a country house or hilltop hideaway that comes equipped with gentle people named Ivy or Maud or Malcolm who will cook, tend, mend, diaper, and launder for you. Who will 'Mister Peter, please' you all day long, pamper you with homemade coconut pie, admire you when you look 'soft' (handsome), giggle at your jokes and weep when you leave."

Ivy, Maud, and Malcolm were living in dirt-floor shacks where children with rickets sat dull-eyed in the yards. They walked miles to

work in hotel kitchens and scraped uneaten food into the garbage, then they walked home along scalding roads while the tourists sped by in shiny cars. So if Ivy, Maud, and Malcolm wept, it wasn't because you were leaving. (74 – 75)

She rightfully critiques the racism of this ad but it leaves the reader feeling like she is trying to prove “I’m not like other white people.” She credits this supposed heightened sensibility in the Afterword to her “own history as a [U.S.] Southerner, [and] as a white child who was partly raised by black folk and therefore felt safe among them, no matter how poor they were” (256). According to Gunst, being raised by black people in general and one woman in particular, around whom her 2005 memoir centers, gives her special insights or at least a courage that the average white person does not seem to have. But the implication is that poor black people are something to be legitimately feared. Now given the nature of her project, this is most likely not what Gunst wants to convey, but her lack of racial introspection throughout *Born Fi’ Dead* makes it challenging to believe otherwise. She casts herself as doing something noble in taking on this venture even as she critiques the classist and racist hierarchies of Jamaican neo-colonialism:

It seems to me, looking back over the past half-century of nationhood, that Jamaica inherited a particularly vicious legacy from England. I do not mean slavery and colonialism and all the other abominations that we are accustomed to speak of. I am thinking

instead of the chronic obsession with class, the way that the poor are devalued as having no political life, no history worth writing, no voices worth listening to. It was against this raft of assumptions that I wrote *Born Fi' Dead*. . . . this was why no Jamaican had already written a book like *Born Fi' Dead*. No one had written it because no one thought that the sufferers mattered enough to be worth such a book.

For this is really the nastiest legacy of colonialism: this entrenched belief that only the rich, the literate, the metropolitan-minded – only the ones who attain to the birthright of that England which Linton

Kwesi Johnson so rightly calls “A Bitch” – only they matter. (259 – 260)

I agree that classism (and racism) are obsessions in Jamaica, and every other global economy, but I definitely attach these issues to the legacy of colonialism and slavery. And given that historical legacy, I wonder how much her whiteness and her foreign-ness facilitated the publication of such a book in the first place. Where do the profits go? Do the sufferers see any of them? I also wonder if the so-called sufferers can even access the book and how it impacts their lives, aside from jeopardizing some people's safety? Imani Tafari-Ama admits that, “A number of people were subsequently shot and killed both in America and Jamaica because of names that were called and things which were printed and published by Gunst in ‘*Born Fi' Dead*’” (204). We only hear about Trevor. It is saddening to discover that there are several other victims and in both the U.S. and Jamaica. Although Gunst

recognizes the risks that informin' can have, it does not prevent her from writing the book (nor should it in theory). People such as Trevor did not want to use a fake name because he felt that everyone would still recognize him from the character's activism. Yet somehow there still feels like there is a trace of cultural insensitivity on her part – especially given the number of deaths that allegedly occurred because of her writing.

What does all of this have to do with Jamaican masculinity? Gunst's positioning of the violent Jamaican Other, this black male beast that she feels safe getting close to despite the warnings from everyone to stay far away from "down there" (xvi, 254), also works to reinscribe images of the black male brute. She becomes the white woman sitting in King Kong's palm – the only thing that will subdue his innate fury or translate it for frightened onlookers. Therefore, while the book does aim to create a platform and give credence to a devalued voice, it is similar to *Third World Cop* and *Shottas* in that its most *lasting* images leave the reader fearing the possibility of ever encountering one of those uncontrollable children, the transnational infection. Therefore, I am left leaning towards agreeing with Mimi Shellers's extensive interpretation of the text:

Beyond Gunst's account of the 'Jamaican posse underworld' in *Born fi' Dead* (1995), publishers have embraced other journalistic extended travelogues or memoirs such as Chris Salewicz's *Rude Boy: Once Upon A Time in Jamaica* (2000). Such books give currency to widely

circulating representations of Jamaica as a place of violence, drugs, and gunmen, without actually offering much in the way of explanation for those phenomena. What is distinctive about this genre of writing is the way in which it rests on the authority of an outsider-insider, that is, a Northerner who has infiltrated the ghettos of Kingston and can speak the lingo. When violence again swept Kingston and nearby areas in early July 2001, . . . the world press turned to such commentators to help them explain the political turf wars between the supporters of Edward Seaga's Jamaica Labour Party and the ruling People's National Party.

. . . However sympathetic the authors might consider themselves, they are essentially extending a form of fascination with the fundamental dualities of Caribbean culture and its 'poor sufferahs'. The authors draw on the easily available contrast between noble 'natives' and an inexplicably violent gun culture of criminality and corruption. They slip into 'Patwa' to demonstrate their own mastery of the local culture, translating its more exotic aspects for the armchair tourist-reader. . . . This imagery and the tone of the writing both play on the contrast between Jamaica as a pleasure island and the 'natural' violence inscribed onto its mountainous interior landscape and by extension its 'rude' people. (170 - 171)

Chris Salewicz's is also a white outsider whose frequent visits to the island and black Jamaican friends give him honorary insider status. While Gunst is from America, Salewicz is from England. But his book primarily moves between his interviewing experiences with a laundry list of musical artists and producers, jaunts between luxury hotels or guest houses across the landscape and musings about the island's political and religious history. In the midst of it he interrupts his narrative with italicized passages that slowly retell how he and his cottage-mates are robbed, terrorized but eventually left physically unharmed. But unlike Gunst, it is hard to tell what Salewicz's larger agenda really is. He is clearly speaking to a white British reader who may potentially visit Jamaica, but his descriptions definitely ring of cultural insensitivity:

If you come direct from an air-conditioned WASP world, you may soon wish you could strip the flesh off of your body and shove it into a spin-dryer.

If you are a black Jamaican, however, you have come to terms with it a long way back. You have understood that the brain-twisting humidity and black clouds and afternoon downpours that accompany it are simply part of the life-giving forces to which you are allied. The humidity is the provider of the water that nourishes the land, the goats, the sugar cane, the bananas, the ganja.

Which is a way of saying that there is some heavy culture shock going down when these polyestered innocents abroad amble their cheeseburger behinds through the hotel lobby. Suddenly they may come face to face with a dreader-than-dread congregation – tammed, locked and spliffed to the hilt – squatting down in a corner and *making crazy jungle rhythm on some bongos*. (108 – 109, emphasis added)

Although he is trying to blend light humor in with the wry sarcasm of someone who has “been there, done that,” it comes off as condescending. And even when he is trying to critique potentially unsafe behavior, the way he does it feels racist. When discussing the escalated prostitution that goes on around Negril’s beach-front properties at night, he warns prospective travelers about the black female sex workers:

Uncharitably, you worry that even by speaking with them you might end up with a life-threatening disease. You also fear for the health of the young Americans who pour into Negril over their spring break for a few days’ hedonism. (219)

There is no concern for the women or critical analysis as to why they might be in the position to have to do this work. All the reader is left with is the image of the diseased black (female) body. What does this have to do with Jamaican masculinity? Again, it is an extension of the image of the black brute because these warnings come packaged under headings specifically about black Jamaican men (*Rude Boy* and *Born Fi’ Dead*).

Additionally, both book covers use the Rastafari colors of red, gold and green to frame black-and-white photographs of rugged, black male faces and bodies. Additionally, the back cover of *Rude Boy* features a picture of Jamaica's Gun Court, the capital-letter sign standing high over a chain-link fenced laced with coils of barbed wire. Neither book cover reveals a picture of their white authors. In this clever marketing move, the unaware consumer who is vaguely familiar with the symbolism of red, gold and green, sees black faces and immediately feels a level of authenticity, an insider's escort into the lives that they only dare to experience in a book. But these images are in line with the filmic images of the black male body that we see in *The Harder They Come*, *Third World Cop* and *Shottas*. They frame the black Jamaican male as a menacing violent threat whose authentic identity lies in the nature around him and ultimately his savagery. And it is most interesting to note that white British Chris Salewicz is one of the co-writers of the film *Third World Cop*, Jamaica's "highest grossing film!"

This irony raises the question of audience and who these images are ultimately for. The portrayal of the *dominant* male characters is not varied. Consumers have no real choices when looking at Jamaican (and ultimately Caribbean) masculinity in film and literature – particularly with those images that circulate outside of Jamaica. Filmmaking and book publishing can indeed be expensive ventures, so it is not surprising that films and even books from smaller islands do not get as wide a circulation as Jamaican

products do. As a result, the entire Caribbean tends to be collapsed into the one island of Jamaica and that island is assumed to hold all authentic Caribbean-ness. For example, the British novel *Yardie* by Jamaican author Victor Headley (1992) tells the U.K. version of *Shottas* because the Jamaican hero gets into London with a fake passport to deliver cocaine for someone else, steals half of it and quickly sets himself up as a force to contend with. The book was originally published on a desktop computer by the two-man operation of black-owned X-Press, and it “sold at clothing shops, hairdressers, and even on top of over-turned dumpsters outside of nightclubs. On word of mouth alone, *Yardie* has sold over 12,000 copies” and the major publishing houses soon took note (Alibris.com). Its U.S. publication was a year later in 1993. This type of popularity speaks to the proliferation of the narrow ways of being for black Jamaican masculinity. While wildly admired, these images only serve to reinforce the racist status quo that constructs black lives through the lens of minstrelsy.

So if these are the images of masculinity that are circulating in the global market, can they be in any way helpful in the project of deconstructing those very images? Do they turn us into voyeurs looking at and consuming images of “real” masculinity, images that merely contribute to false one-dimensional portraits of shotta badmen, or is there a way that they can give readers helpful insights?

Given the aim of my project to do such deconstruction, I would like to think that these filmic and literary texts have some use because they give us a look into the norms that the mainstream is devouring both on and off the island no matter how disturbing those norms are (although with the anxiety around being seen as an “informa,” I might guess that *Born Fi’ Dead* has a wider audience off of the island). These representations of masculinity become instruments of *dismemberment*, because they divide male beings/bodies into fragments of a whole self. This is very similar to how gun violence rips and shreds whole beings/bodies into painfully dismembered parts. The task at hand is to find ways to counteract this *destruction*.

CONCLUSION

The legacy of colonialism is a legacy of *dismemberment*. The colonial history of Jamaica severed black bodies into fragmented pieces of whole selves for many years before, as well as after, the country's independence. This baggage recreates colonial hierarchies and continues to inform contemporary ideologies and social structures. This means that most hierarchical relationships must take this history into consideration – especially those that involve issues of race, class and gender. As Donna Hope says,

Based on the historical experiences of Caribbean peoples, slavery as a system has been seen as the main social experience on which rests the foundation of contemporary ideologies and relations of society. . . . while other oppressive features may be peculiar to these Caribbean societies, race and class have been identified as the two dominant factors intersecting with gender. These have been noted in the colonial legacy and, it is argued, still effectively inform contemporary gender relations. (368 – 369)

This means that, “Concepts of beauty and ugliness, ideas of good speech or bad speech still depend on their proximity to what is a white, Eurocentric ideal” (Hope 369 – 370). Caribbean (Jamaican) realities seem to be forever measured against a postcolonial standard. However, it is important to note that several critics take issue with this, challenging the idea that cultural

products from postcolonial communities are always preoccupied with postcolonial issues. John McLeod summarizes one such argument:

Arun P. Mukherjee makes the important point in an essay called 'Whose Post-Colonialism and Whose Postmodernism?' that this assumption 'leaves us only one modality, one discursive position. We are forever forced to interrogate European discourses, of only one particular kind, the ones that degrade and deny our humanity. I would like to respond that our cultural productions are created in response to our own needs ...' (World Literature Written in English, 30 (2), 1990, p.6) (28).

Ironically, this frustration is precisely what the legacy of dismemberment creates – a constant need to either explain oneself through the lens of a colonial past or justify why it is not necessary to do so. Either way, that postcolonial presence lurks in the shadows of history. And it is because of this legacy that we must question how it informs the images showing up in contemporary Jamaican film and literature.

Considering male identity and power, Donna Hope confirms the hegemonic pattern of masculinity seen across the filmic and literary texts that we have examined in the previous chapters. She describes a “real” man as follows:

A real man is one who can act as traditional hunter and provider. He is able to access the symbols of masculinity as wealth and power –

money, brand-name clothing, flashy cars, beautiful women – with very little effort. For the man who cannot access these symbols, issues of sex and sexuality attain primacy in laying the foundation for definitions of his identity. [And] It may be argued that this phenomenon is a throwback to the freelance stud of the slavery and colonial era. (370)

She repeats this message in a slightly different way when she says, “For Afro-Jamaican men with little access and few links to the relations of production, who are positioned in a precarious socioeconomic space, more and more emphasis is placed on rooting their masculine identities through the extreme manifestation of masculinity: the conquering of and dominance over the female, since at the root of masculinity is the sexual relationship between men and women” (371). While this is true, I would take Hope’s argument a step further to say that root of dominance ultimately lies in *violence* or the perceived threat of violence, and this is often used as a means to achieve the conquering of women (and other men) that she mentions. It is this violence that is at the root of colonialism and it is this violence that takes new shape in the present. As Frantz Fanon says,

The settler-native relationship is a mass relationship. The settler pits brute force against the weight of numbers. He is an exhibitionist. His preoccupation with security makes him remind the native out loud that there he alone is master. The settler keeps alive in the native an anger which he deprives of outlet; the native is trapped in the tight

links of the chains of colonialism. But we have seen that inwardly the settler can only achieve a pseudo petrification. The native's muscular tension finds outlet regularly in bloodthirsty explosions – in tribal warfare, in feuds between septs, and in quarrels between individuals.

(*Wretched* 53 – 54)

The “bloodthirsty explosions” are part of the postcolonial inheritance and I focus on black men's bodies as a site where this postcolonial inheritance is enacted. The representations in the select texts reinforce the colonial legacy of patriarchal domination. After colonialism, men and women were assigned different gendered expectations and therefore, different hierarchical roles. As a result, maleness was created as a category separate from and *superior to* that of femaleness. Oyèrónké Oyewùmí describes how this process took shape in West Africa:

In Britain, access to power was gender-based; therefore, politics was largely men's job; and colonization, which is fundamentally a political affair, was no exception. Although both African men and women as conquered peoples were excluded from the higher echelons of colonial state structures, men were represented at the lower levels of government. The system of indirect rule introduced by the British colonial government recognized the male chief's authority at the local level but did not acknowledge the existence of female chiefs.

Therefore, women were effectively excluded from all colonial state structures. . . .

The very process by which females were categorized and reduced to 'women' made them ineligible for leadership roles. The basis for this exclusion was their biology, a process that was a new development in Yorùbá society. The emergence of women as an identifiable category, defined by their anatomy and subordinated to men in all situations, resulted, in part, from the imposition of a patriarchal colonial state.

(257)

In this way, we can see that the colonial state itself was a patriarchal system and Oyewùmí cites Helen Callaway's description of the two primary ways in which colonialism was patriarchal: "colonial personnel were male" and "colonization was presented as a 'man-sized' job – the ultimate test of manhood" (258). Although Callaway's research is based in Nigeria, her connections between colonization and gender are still useful here because they describe how the British defined power. As a former British colony, Jamaica would certainly be affected by these ideological beliefs.

This brings us back to the issue of male identity and power. Black men are the presumed inheritors of colonial white male hegemonic rule, but as Donna Hope points out, men in lower socioeconomic positions have limited access to the "traditional and emerging symbols of social mobility and power in Jamaica, including socioeconomic background at the middle or upper

levels, high levels of education and a white-collar career" (371). This leaves them scrambling to patch together a male identity that they see garnering attention and respect. As Brambles tells Laurie Gunst in *Born Fi' Dead*, it is easy to make different choices if you are not in a position of economic deprivation (127 – 128). However, the socioeconomic status of residents in Jamaica's inner-city communities means that many of them, (boys and men in particular), are routinely susceptible to exploitation and this exploitation is generally connected to gun violence.

But while this is one of the realities in Jamaica it is not the only reality, thus begging the question as to why the image of the black male brute, this violent shotta, is the only one that continues to be globally recycled in these films? Martiniquan scholar, Edouard Glissant underlines the importance of diverse representations:

One of the most disturbing consequences of colonization could well be this notion of a single History, and therefore of power, which has been imposed on others by the West. . . . The struggle against a single History for the cross-fertilization of histories means repossessing both a true sense of one's time and identity: proposing in an unprecedented way a revaluation of power. (93)

If the hegemonic model of masculinity presents a notion of single History and one representation of (false) power, the proliferation of these images ultimately unearths the flip side of hegemony – the power to fund and

distribute your product. If we take a moment to compare Jamaica to the model of filmmaking growing out of Latin America, the issues become clear.

There has been a film boom in Latin America since the 1960s generating a diverse body of feature films and documentaries that have been steadily coming out of the region. Rachel Moseley-Wood cites Julianne Burton's explanation that,

. . . political developments in Latin America after World War II brought about significant shifts in film production that reflected a growing awareness, particularly among the younger generation, of social and economic inequalities. This led to a redefinition of the role of film, Burton explains, in which *film became valued not only as entertainment but also for its social function*, and the priority given in *the Hollywood model* to technical and commercial concerns *was fiercely rejected*. (381 – 382, emphasis added)

Moseley-Wood goes on to discuss how this rejection led to the experimentation with new models and conceptual frameworks and when the 1961 US-imposed embargo cut off all access to Hollywood films, the isolation forced internal creativity (382). She quotes one Cuban filmmaker's thoughts about this early Hollywood disconnection:

Initially it seemed that this cutting off of the feature film supply was a disaster. Our public was thoroughly accustomed to those films. But I think it was actually a great boon for us. ... They have come to accept

and understand other film languages, other approaches to filmmaking.

(382)

What is most striking about his comments is that the Cuban public had become “accustomed to those films” but later learned (albeit by force) to understand and appreciate other “film languages” and “approaches” – Glissant’s different “histories.” More significantly, once weaned off of Hollywood’s debilitating images, film as an art acquired new significance and Cuba’s film industry grew in both depth and breadth! Once free from formulaic narratives, it was as if film’s true power was finally evident. Now although Cuba is a unique example because state funds were set aside for filmmaking and film production was seen as “linked to the revolutionary process” (382), it still raises the question of what could happen if the Hollywood cord could be pulled out of islands like Jamaica. Moseley-Wood extends the comparison:

. . . filmmakers in the Anglophone Caribbean have not been the beneficiaries of state funds, and Caribbean audiences’ enthusiastic and easily accommodated consumption of the Hollywood product has meant that *local films not only have to compete with Hollywood but are likely to be rejected by local audiences if they move too far beyond familiar narrative patterns and models*. It is almost redundant to state that funding, as one of the most challenging obstacles to film production and distribution, places enormous pressure on the filmmaker to realize

a profit, but it is important to bear in mind that *economic factors have significantly affected the types of films that have been produced in Jamaica*, the Anglophone Caribbean's most significant producer of films to date. (382, emphasis added)

This means that on some level it is literally not beneficial to paint alternative images of Jamaican masculinity. But this of course, applies only to those who stand to profit from this perpetuation such as producers and filmmakers. Even upper and middle class Jamaicans, as well as government officials, profit from these images because they justify the treatment of lower-class communities. However, the black Jamaican men, (along with women and children), who are living lives besieged by economic lack do not ultimately benefit. So where does that leave us?

Beacon of Hope

Michael Dash describes Martiniquan poet Aimée Césaire's writing as being passionately concerned with "psychic 're-memberment'" (332). Postcolonial theorists are also invested in a kind of psychic re-memberment. I hope this project in some small way can follow in those footsteps of re-memberment to stitch together possible solutions to the problems of violence and its impact on the black male body. In this way, those re-membered bodies

can light the path for men (and women) to follow. The final two stanzas of Linton Kwesi Johnson's "Beacon of Hope" symbolize the process:

welcome nocturnal friend
I name you beacon of hope
tonight fear fades to oblivion
as you guide us beyond the stars
to a new horizon

tomorrow a stranger will enter
my hut my cave my cool cavern of gloom
I will give him bread
he will bring good news from afar
I will give him water
he will bring a gift of light (60 – 61)

There are alternative representations of Jamaican masculinity out there, but they get overshadowed by images of the glorified gunslinger – they are hidden in the dark like a "nocturnal friend." But if fed and nurtured they can lead the way out of the "cavern of gloom" and into a world filled with "good news." And that good news lies in making room for the vulnerable male image, the model of masculinity that unabashedly follows the path of tenacious tenderness and powerful peace. The real work comes in finding ways to protect these more fragile images and put them on center stage. It is possible because they do exist.

Think back to Ivan in the film sitting on the bus on his way to town. We first meet him taking a green mango out of a paper bag on his lap that he lovingly admires and tells another passenger that he is bringing it for his mother. Although it represents his innocence at this point in the film, it also

represents his tenderness. He is bringing a mango (and other things) for his mother because he cares for her, is attentive to her feelings and knows that she will like it. He also does not mind sharing his joy about his gift with strangers. The man he tells interestingly instructs Ivan to “put it up [away].” Considering that this is symbolic of Ivan’s emotive generosity, this command can be interpreted in multiple ways. He could be letting Ivan know that those feelings will not serve him well where they are going, as in we do not do that here. Or it could be a gesture of protection, like issuing a warning to cover that up for now and be careful who you show it to. Either way, Ivan pushes it back down in his bag, and this bag is later stolen by Winston with his other things. This means that once in the city, Ivan’s innocence and tenderness are literally taken from him. When viewed through a postcolonial framework, the rural innocent (feminized) Ivan is violated by the penetrative domineering (masculine) city, and eventually he will learn to navigate this cityspace by adopting the master’s tools – in the end he becomes just as penetrative and domineering and this seems like the ultimate success.

We watch his journey from trolling the streets begging for work and food to facing the line of police officers who eventually gun him down. But remember that he faces the officers in the showdown with *empty* guns – he even takes the last bullet *out* of one gun before coming out into the open. This means that on some levels Ivan’s last stance is suicidal; although it may look glorious, the film is also subtly saying that this model of masculinity is

suicidal – losing one’s tenderness (and community) ultimately means death. As Ivan’s hit song says, “the harder they come, the harder they fall.” Being tougher and harder means facing bigger and bigger defeats. This is clearly an argument *against* hegemonic masculinity, a call to shun violence and find another path. But the colossal image of cow-*bwoy* Ivan with (empty) guns blazing at the end of the film obscures this understated admonition. He is dying as a legend and that *appears* to be a decent trade-off but, as I was reminded by Margaret Gill from UWI’s Cave Hill campus after a recent conference presentation, this ignores the tender soul that lurks beneath his “bravura mask” (Gunst 2009). Ivan’s cow-*bwoy* masculinity is a shield worn only to hide his vulnerability since when he exposed it before (took his green mango out of the bag) it was violated. As a masked gang member said in Ross Kemp’s documentary on Jamaican gangs, “this is not our dream, but dem [rival gang members] force we to do dis.” It takes work to see through the violence to excavate the vulnerable. However, as we shall see there are glimpses all around – even in film that appears to be glorifying violence. In these cases, some may argue that the dominant message is less about how glorious violent masculinity is, and more about the self-destruction to which this model of manhood can lead. Either way, there is a beacon of hope.

Image Power

Imani Tafari-Ama references Stanford University linguist, John Baugh's research findings which reveal that although negative and "manipulating language can certainly shape [public] perceptions" (365), social groups require a certain level of power to really sway public opinion. She summarizes the argument:

. . . less powerful social groups who try to change the meanings of words face a higher hurdle. Usually, whether the usage will change permanently or not, depends on *whether it is in the interest of the mainstream culture* to accept the change. (365, emphasis added)

In other words, redefining negative words will not stick if mainstream culture is not invested in making such a switch. This is what Moseley-Wood gets at when she says that Jamaican filmmakers have to worry about their films being "rejected by local audiences if they move too far beyond familiar narrative patterns and models" (382). But considering how limiting these representations really are, the audience's insistence on sticking to a Hollywood model is like its own "colonization of the mind" and Hollywood becomes the colonizer. John McLeod provides a quick summary:

Colonialism is perpetuated in part by justifying to those in the colonising [sic] nation the idea that it is right and proper to rule over other peoples, and by getting colonised [sic] people to accept their lower ranking in the colonial order of things – a process we can call

‘colonising [sic] the mind’. It operates by persuading people to internalise [sic] its logic and speak its language; to perpetuate the values and assumptions of the colonisers [sic] as regards the ways they perceive and represent the world. (18)

This (mis)representation is what Jamaica Kincaid calls the “language of the criminal.” As she sees it, using inherited colonial models will always reproduce language/images that misrepresent the colonized:

For the language of the criminal can contain only the goodness of the criminal’s deed. The language of the criminal can explain and express the deed only from the criminal’s point of view. It cannot contain the horror of the deed, the injustice of the deed, the agony, the humiliation inflicted on me. (32)

From this perspective, narratives patterned after Hollywood stories will always portray black Jamaican men as violent brutes – it is part of their formula. Therefore, the solution lies in what Kenyan novelist Ngugi wa Thiong’o calls “decolonising the mind.” This endeavor seeks to redefine negative language and garner mainstream support. For example, this is the reason why Rastafarians are invested in a lifestyle that is more life-affirming of the black image. Tafari-Ama explains how this investment is manifest in everyday syntax:

Rastas think of and speak of young brothers as ‘lions’ and ‘kings’, and the sisters as ‘lionesses’, ‘goddesses’ and ‘queens’; instead of using the

now popular and supposedly international urban Black slang descriptions such as 'niggas', 'dogs' and 'gangsters' for men, and terms like 'bitches' and 'whores' for women. It is all a matter of proper and positive self consciousness and self-identification. (366)

If we think of images as a syntax or language of its own, we can see that mainstream culture has historically painted black bodies and black culture as inferior, aberrant and savage. This practice goes back to slavery.

During slavery, black bodies were something to own, control and profit from, and black *male* bodies were cast as especially menacing and violent. Hilary Beckles reminds us of the wider social discourse that contextualized black masculinity in colonial Caribbean communities:

Violence was the principal social action by which enslaved black men could subvert the security and stability of the slave owner's project. Only violence by slaves could terminate the colonial mission and liberate the enslaved community. . . . It was not that enslaved black men needed violence to assert or secure their masculinities, but that the right to take life, which white men held as a constitutional privilege, could also be grasped by black men – hence the function of the subaltern's violence as an ultimate and intimate equalizer. (239)

Violence was part of colonial nation-building and as Beckles says, "Colonial masculinities, then, took social form within the context of a culture of violence which embraced all relations of social living and consciousness

(240).” Although *all* masculinities were framed by the culture of violence that is embedded in imperialism, only *black* men were cast as being inappropriately violent. They became uncontrollable black brutes and it is this colonial legacy that we see reinforced in contemporary representations.

The narratives of popular culture still represent black male bodies as something to own, control and use for profit because the violent black male image has become a marketable figure. However, while it might be possible to argue that there is a *slightly* wider range of African American male images circulating in popular culture (albeit difficult to find), images of Jamaican masculinity on the *screen* all seem to be stuck on the page of violence, frozen like the image of Ivan in his gunslinger photographs, forever destined to be typecast as the shotta. It is important to note that the screen images give the impression that all Jamaican (and thereby Caribbean) masculinity is the same. However, several Caribbean authors create a range of masculinities in their *literary* texts that offer much more nuanced identities on the printed page. Similar to the luxury of space that Michael Thelwell had to tell Ivan’s story in the novel of *The Harder They Come*, authors such as Opal Palmer Adisa and Earl Lovelace challenge the myopic film representations by giving readers a glimpse into the interior lives of their male characters. In this way, they are able to connect heroism and personal growth to what Kenneth Ramchand cites in Earl Lovelace’s novel *The Dragon Can’t Dance* as “an acknowledgment of the inner life and an *embrace of feelings* still despised as soft, weak and

feminine (323, emphasis added). In these complex tales, being in touch with these so-called “feminine” feelings is presented as the only way to be fully human/e. But as we see with Ivan and his big guns at the end of the film, screen images of the shotta can obscure these more quiet subtle moments of genuine strength. In popular Jamaican films, it is easy to think that strength only comes from physical domination. And considering that film images circulate more widely than print images do, the global image of Jamaican masculinity is one that is tied to the almighty gun.

Gun Power

In shotta films, Jamaican men operate in very supernatural ways because masculinity coupled with gun violence always conquers all. This supernatural ability to solve all issues with a gun turns these characters into mythic (hegemonic) heroes, even in real life accounts such as *Born Fi' Dead*. Keep in mind that myths have archetypes embedded in them that do not change. Therefore, the representation of *heroic* Jamaican masculinity across various filmic and literary representations does not change. The film images in particular, consistently communicate that nothing a man has is truly his unless he can defend it in gun combat with other men – including his own life (Arjet 129). Therefore, the patterns that emerge in filmic texts such as *The Harder They Come* (film and novel), *For Nothing At All*, *Third World Cop* and *Shottas* are mirrors of embedded social scripts of hegemonic masculinity.

This script requires that men be tough, fearless, always in control, emotionally distant, financially stable, dominant over and distinct from women and subordinate masculinities, and staunchly heterosexual. As Robert Jensen says, "Men are assumed to be naturally competitive and aggressive, and being a 'real man' is therefore marked by the struggle for control, conquest, and domination. A man looks at the world, sees what he wants, and takes it" (26). These are the guiding principles of the Enlightenment project. More importantly, he takes what he wants because he has a gun. When it comes to Jamaican masculinity, guns are seen as a natural extension of the body and the script for dominant masculinity is inextricably linked to gun violence. bell hooks describes this script as a product of what she calls "dominator culture:"

Dominator culture teaches all of us that the core of our identity is defined by the will to dominate and control others. We are taught that this will to dominate is more biologically hardwired in males than in females. In actuality, dominator culture teaches us that we are all natural-born killers but that males are more able to realize the predator role. . . . When culture is based on a dominator model, not only will it be violent but it will frame all relationships as power struggles. (*Will* 115 - 116)

If all relationships are framed by power struggles and men are taught that their very being is based on patriarchal power, they often lash out when they

feel as though they are not living up to the basic definitions of manhood. Being a provider, for example, is one of the basic definitions implicit in all of our examined texts. Chris Haywood and Máirtín Mac an Ghaill cite R.W. Connell's research to remind us of how important it is to consider how being on the periphery of a labor market influences the construction of male identity:

For Connell, young unemployed, or under-employed men take up a '*protest masculinity*'. This style is developed in relation to a position of powerlessness where the existing cultural resources for a gendered claim to power are no longer available. In response, men exaggerate, through the pressure of existing masculine conventions, their claims to masculinity. As a result, individuals exhibit spectacular masculinities centred [sic] around sexuality, violence and bohemianism. Connell (1995: 111) suggests that: 'Through interaction in this milieu, the growing boy puts together *a tense freak façade*, making a claim to power where there are no real resources to power'. Protest in this way is the observance, or the exaggerated observance of a male role. (39, emphasis added)

However, let us not confuse the mention of unemployment (or any other challenge that young men are facing) with the faulty suppositions put forth in the black male marginalization thesis that laments that men are no longer in the upper echelons of family, education and the workplace (Miller). Critics

such as Keisha Lindsay point out, “In constructing a perspective which presumes masculinity and femininity to be ‘primarily oppositional’, the thesis serves to reinscribe distinctly patriarchal Caribbean gender constructs – that of demonized woman and victimized man” (74). Moreover, Lindsay reminds us of a point that Peggy Antrobus made years ago: “the fact that throughout the region ‘unemployment among women is everywhere higher than it is among men’ (Antrobus 1986: 23)” (68). Therefore, the problem really lies in the patriarchal definitions of masculinity itself. Keith Nurse helps us to understand in different words:

Most men are not as powerful as they are made out to be. The problem is that they are socialized to see male power and privilege as an entitlement, if not an endowment; this is the essential contradiction in the dominant construction of masculinity. Indeed, it suggests that men, especially those who experience their masculinity in contradictory terms, live in constant fear of being perceived as effeminate by other men and particularly women. The *fear of being unmasked* may be viewed as the basis for homophobia, the backlash against feminism, male-on-male violence, and domestic violence against women. (13 – 14, emphasis added)

Therefore, if we attach the expression of violence to the fear of being unmasked, then we can really see that these images are more about what is *not* being said or on display (ie. what lurks beneath the bravura mask), than

what *is* supposedly being said/ displayed through the barrel of a gun.

Looking at it from this perspective then, the violence is a substitute for and screen of the vulnerability within. And it is this vulnerability that we must make room for.

Re-visionary Power: What Lies Beneath the Mask

One powerful example of visionary masculinity already exists in the film *The Harder They Come*. Ras Pedro's character is peaceful from beginning to end and shows the viewer a different kind of Jamaican masculinity – one that is steeped in the values of love, peace and respect for humanity as framed by the Rastafarian faith. We first meet Pedro breaking the news to his son Rupert that his mother is dead – Pedro is a ganja trader and army soldiers accidentally kill his wife in a raid. After Ivan and Elsa move in to his modest home, it is Pedro who shows Ivan the ropes of ganja trading and Pedro who discourages Ivan from buying guns in the first place. When the police clamp down on the trade in effort to force the other traders to divulge Ivan's hiding place, Pedro is one of the few that wants to resist the temptation of giving up a member of the community for fleeting material gain – sticking together as a group is more important to him. When Ivan has a farewell outing with Elsa, Rupert and Pedro on the beach before his attempted escape to Cuba, Pedro's time is largely preoccupied with taking care of his sickly son. The beach scenes are some of the most tender moments in the film, as we watch Pedro

thoroughly engaged with and attentive to Rupert's every need. Pedro fixes and flies a kite with him, he leads him through the shallows, quick to catch him when he stumbles and just splashes with him in the water. Pedro is also preoccupied with Rupert's wavering health, always asking Elsa for updates and seemingly putting all of his ganja trade money into food and medicine. And let us not forget that Pedro had a wife at one time. Whether common-law or not, his partnership definitely challenges the stereotypical image of the promiscuous and prowling black savage. Even in the end when police are tipped off to Ivan's Cuban escape and they catch Pedro and supposedly beat him for information, we never see him raise a finger in anger or violence. He just sits on the dock in quiet resolve looking up at the officers around him. In the novel, Michael Thelwell includes details that we do not see in the film. Not only does he have the police beat Pedro (and another trader) for information about Ivan, the police shave off Pedro's locs – a common practice of law officials with contempt for Rastafarians. Despite all of this, in the novel we do see him make it back home:

Ras Peter, eyes dull, face lumpy and bruised, limped into the yard.

Elsa saw him enter and ran out shouting.

"Pedro, to God, you alive! But you hurt?"

"No, I man doan hurt." He didn't look at her but limped over to the mango tree and sat down.

"But Pedro," she wailed. "You head –"

“I man doan hurt,” he said. “I man nah feel nutten.”

“I glad,” she said, wiping the tears from her face, “I glad.” (390).

Even though violence is inflicted on his body, Ras Pedro (Peter) does not retaliate. He relies on his faith and inner resolve to make it through the ordeal and eventually he gets back home. Ivan’s fiery finale can distract us from these whispers of peaceful resistance. The final showdown can also seduce us into categorizing all glorified heroism by Ivan’s actions alone. Like the big yellow star emblazoned across his shirt, the gun has the power to mesmerize. However, Pedro gently reminds us that some heroism is not always out front in bright colors. Some heroism, the most sustainable heroism, is neatly tucked in the folds.

Alternative models of masculinity are spreading across the visual landscape. Films like *Rockers* (1978) are a perfect example. As Ifeona Fulani explains, the film celebrates the power of collective action over gunfire in the name of conflict resolution:

The main plot of *Rockers* deals with questions of the abuse of power and justice for the black man in a racially exploitative society. When Horsemouth [the protagonist] discovers that his bike has been stolen and warehoused by the henchman of an organized criminal gang, he does not go to the police, knowing that the police would not intervene on behalf of a Rastafarian. Instead, Horsemouth organizes a group of brethren to *raid the criminal’s warehouse* and retrieve his bike. The raid

is successful; . . . The heist is accomplished without fighting or bloodshed, thus offering a representation of black masculine agency uncontaminated by violence. (paragraph 28, emphasis added)

Rockers offers a powerful metaphor of postcolonial theory in practice (and the film incidentally came out the same year of Edward Said's monumental text *Orientalism*). To "raid the criminal's warehouse" uses the "language of the criminal" against the criminal in a different way; it follows one of the theoretical strands of putting "classic" texts to new use. So instead of stealing for the material gain of the criminal/colonizer, stealing here is like an act of social banditry to benefit the community/colonized because they empty the entire warehouse (as well as the boss's house) and return all of the property to the community. Although there are a few moments of fist fighting and a gun is displayed as a threat, there are no bullets fired in the entire film. Fulani goes on to compare *Rockers* to *The Harder They Come*:

Even taking into account generic differences between the two films, the absence from *Rockers* of weapons and masculinist displays of bravado challenges the representation of black masculine agency – the figure of the *ruud bwai* – offered in *The Harder They Come*. . . . In response, *Rockers* challenges *The Harder They Come*'s celebration of the individualistic, self-destructive and ultimately unproductive rebelliousness of the gun-loving *ruud bwai* with multiple representations of Rastafarian masculinity. . . . It shows the Rastaman as individually non-violent, but

empowered by community and therefore with the potential to act as a force for social justice. (6, emphasis in original)

In this way Rastafari (as seen with Pedro in *The Harder They Come*) is a site of peace and alternative model of Jamaican masculinity. Although Fulani describes Pedro as a “moral but passive, . . . sufferer who barely survives by eking out a living on the fringes of the ganja trade” (6), he still represents a story of resistance. These moments are important because they shift the camera’s lens more and more towards images of non-violence. Their cumulative effects can steadily chip away at the dominant brutish image which does have an impact on how societies (and particular classes within society) construct themselves. It can invest audiences in a new way of looking at a “real/reel” man and slowly but surely contribute to changing male self-images. More importantly, it can influence those men (and women) who have been formerly invested in hegemonic masculinity to rethink their choices.

Many Jamaican men successfully stay away from crime, gangs and the associated violence. Popular films and dancehall tunes, along with the alarming homicide statistics and tragic human rights reports, all make the idea of peaceful Jamaican masculinity hard to believe. The non-violent images are obscured by the very real destruction. But non-violent Jamaican masculinity does exist and the formula for achieving it is relatively straightforward. Gary T. Barker explains:

When young men in low-income and violent settings find conventional means for attaining identity and status – finishing school; acquiring legal, stable and reasonably well-paid employment; having family members who are able to connect with them; having non-delinquent peers; forming their own family – most young men stay out of gangs. (81)

These are community-based solutions and young men must see the viability and glory in creating “conventional” identities. As bell hooks says, “Patriarchal masculinity insists that real men must prove their manhood by idealizing aloneness and disconnection. Feminist masculinity tells men that they become more *real* through the act of connecting with others, through building community” (*Will* 121, emphasis added). We must redefine what it means to be a “real/reel” man. However, in order to compete with the mythic identities grounded in glamorized violence, we must also re-language the notion of what it means to be “conventional” so that it does not connote mediocrity, deficiency or settling for less. If we look back to a couple of the texts that we began with and look forward to examples that are currently flourishing in the community, we can see that these vulnerable moments are all around us – just hidden in plain sight.

True courage and strength must be found in going against the grain of the status quo to embrace a different kind of life. These images are fundamentally more powerful than any gun because of their potential life-

sustaining impact, their *re-memberment* power. But truth be told, while violence attracts more attention, both local and international, there are more *non-violent* models of Jamaican masculinity in actuality than violent ones. According to an April 2008 *Ascribe Newswire* article, “Gang members represent no more than 5 percent of the population of inner-city communities in Jamaica” (2). When one considers dominant perceptions of Jamaican masculinity, this means that a fraction of the inner-city population is having a disproportionate impact on the portrayal and perception of the victimized majority. This lopsided grip mirrors the power that the colonizers had over the colonized. However, as noted earlier, that kind of control only comes from mental shackles – an internal belief in the presumed legitimacy of things. While the violence is serious and escalating at alarming rates, this statistic reminds us that there are many more men who do not choose to be shottas. As bell hooks says,

These visions of black men as healers, able to nurture life, are the representations of black masculinity that “keep it real” for they offer the vision of what is possible, a hint of the spirit that is alive and well in the black male collective being, ready to be reborn. They take our minds and hearts away from images of black males who have known soul murder and speak to us of resurrection, of a world in the making where all is well with black men’s souls, where they are free and made whole. (*We* 132)

We find examples of these moments of revisionary power in quiet places. For many, they reside in the church. In the novel *For Nothing at All* Colin turns to the church and ends up as the only character not dead or imprisoned, and he is the only person Wesley chooses to speak to during his days of silence. In this way, Ellis reminds us that religion still plays an important role in providing alternatives for many Jamaican communities. We see alternatives reflected in Ivan on the bus with the mango for his mother, and even in Biggs's rare reflections when he says things like it is "monsters we ah create." We have to remind ourselves that these images do exist so that that they can help us stand firm against the hegemonic masculinity wave that threatens to crash over everything in its path.

Peace Power

One final example of how alternative models of masculinity are spreading comes in the form of Ninja Man, a popular dancehall artist infamous for his hyper-violent gun lyrics. In February 2008, he was asked to close the ceremonies of a UWI, Mona conference with his famous song 1990 "Border Clash." Professor Carolyn Cooper, often seen as a dancehall apologist, introduced Ninja Man by contextualizing his hit song. As reported by Basil Walters in the *Jamaica Observer*, Cooper said,

"Ninja Man's 1990 composition, *Border Clash*, is the classic articulation of the recurrent motif in Jamaican dancehall culture that demarcate

contestation for power in a wide range of phases of interest. In its narrowest sense the dancehall clash denotes the on stage competition between rival deejays and sound systems contending for mastery before a discriminating audience.

More broadly, the clash is not just a performance event, but becomes trenchant metaphor for the hostile interfacing for the warring zones in Jamaican society where for example, rival politicians, area dons, community leaders and their followers, contend for the control of territory both literal and symbolic.” (2)

After this lengthy introduction, Ninja Man came out on stage, but *refused* to perform the song because he felt that it was too violent! He told the audience that he was trying to make a personal change. As Walters reports, it turned out that both he and the audience were on the same page: “‘Right now mi take a very serious aim inna di country, and anything weh too violent, mi kinda refrain mi self from it,’ . . . Everyone, including Cooper, applauded long and hard” (2). Ninja Man continued:

“When you use dis term Border Clash most of the time, a man feel like yu a deal wid, like sey fi hold borders and boundaries. Well, right now mi cut off all border line, all boundaries and a one God, one aim, one unity, one umbrella we a say inna Jamaica,” . . . “we waan bring all the youths dem weh inna di fighting inna Jamaica, weh inna di politics ting, di ghetto confusion, di every day gang rival, we waan cut dem

outta di violence and bring dem inna one unity. And di only way fi do dat is use the music, and if the music is a thing weh a tell yu sey kill dem and murda dem, border clash, and di yute dem a listen and a shoot after one another, lets refrain from border clash and dem tune deh and do songs like these.” (2)

After which Ninja Man sang a different song whose lyrics echoed his new peace mission. Borders and boundaries definitely connect with the forced containment, terror and violence of colonization, as well as the replication in contemporary political warfare (remember the significance of borders and boundaries in *For Nothing at All*). But he is trying to resist this legacy; Ninja Man is out to revise the “language of the criminal” because he recognizes the power of popular culture, and sees music as a key site for change.

I agree with this revisionary aim, but also feel that visual images have an equal if not greater sway on “the youths dem.” In his documentary about Jamaican gangs, a *twenty-four* year old *don* answers Ross Kemp’s question about why Jamaica is such a violent society with what I feel captures the issue at hand. From behind the bandana covering his nose and mouth, a hat that covers the rest of his head and brow, his disguised voice admits,

I think sometimes the guys that make *the movies*, that *have a lot to do with the people who take up this kind of life*. ‘Cause everybody want to be a movie star or a gangster and a movie star. From my point of view, the majority of the people in the world is gangsta. I think the police is

gangsta. I think the Prime Minister is gangsta. But they're high-level gangsters. Theirs the same thing we do, like what they do. It's just that they're legal to do it. (*YouTube*, Part Five, emphasis added)

This young don is very clear. Gangsterism is not reserved for impoverished communities for what bigger gangster move could be made than the history of colonialism itself? But he also stresses that the *images* of violent masculinity definitely impact the constructions of maleness in Jamaica. They certainly have a soundtrack, but the visual representation is often more seductive. Glorified gun battles, bulletproof dons and lavish lifestyles leave young men struggling to live up to similar standards and reach similar heights (even when they know the self-destructive risks). Like Ivan's empty guns in the final showdown, this choice is really a hollow low. It leads to nothing but death and community devastation. More importantly, it is generally an attempt to mask internal vulnerability.

The good news is that the pendulum is swinging back towards peace. Ninja Man's actions represent a new reclamation of the power of peace and a louder celebration of the *holistic* over the hegemonic model of masculinity. There are community organizations making significant gains such as the S-Corner Complex in Bennetlands, Jamaica that is showcased on the *YouTube* documentary *Together Against Violence – Jamaica*. S-Corner Complex staff have partnered with the religious leaders, residents and the dons themselves to reclaim their communities from the violence. The slow but steady drop in the

crime rates in Bennetlands is testimony to the burgeoning peace movement.

Gary T. Barker reminds us that anyone can join this movement regardless of where they may be in life:

This is the hope that sustains voices of resistance and helps restore dignity to being a young man. It should not be shameful to be a young man living in a low-income setting. No young man should be treated as a walking deficit or potential criminal, or sexual predator in the making. Even after men have acted in ways that are harmful to themselves, or their partners or others around them, we must still . . . look for the hope that sustains positive change and development. . . . By listening to the voices of resistance, by engaging them in programme [sic] efforts and policy development, it is possible to resist rigid and violent versions of manhood and in the process to help more young men achieve a masculine ethic of care, respect and empathy.

(157)

Indeed all of our lives – men and women, boys and girls – depend on it. And bell hooks reminds us of just that:

Visionary feminism is a wise and loving politics. It is rooted in the love of male and female being, refusing to privilege one over the other. The soul of feminist politics is the commitment to ending patriarchal domination of women and men, girls and boys. (*Will* 123)

Making a space for vulnerability and peace is a project that is mutually beneficial. Moving away from violent models of Jamaican masculinity is a different kind of Caribbean migration and some artists dare to explore this twist on family themes in their work. For example, Kenneth Ramchand argues that Earl Lovelace's novel *The Dragon Can't Dance* "gives new resonances to the themes of exile, alienation, voyaging and discovery that dominate West Indian writing" (324). In many ways, excavating the vulnerable male image can have similar effects in everyday life. The process has the potential to provide alternative examples for how other men are dealing with the personal feelings of exile and alienation, while showing their voyage to and discovery of new ways of being that are life-sustaining and community-based. More importantly, it gives men the internal resources necessary to heal and thrive. The protagonist of Earl Lovelace's *The Dragon Can't Dance*, Aldrick, learns this valuable lesson in the very end:

. . . this morning he felt humble before his own feelings, and not so afraid of them. He wanted to call them to him, to feel them. He felt a great distance from himself, as if he had been living elsewhere from himself and he thought that he would like to try and come home to himself; and even though it sounded like some kind of treason, he felt that at least it was the only way he could begin to be true to the promise of the dragon to which he felt bound in some way beyond

reason, beyond explanation, and which he felt had its own truth. (131 – 132)

Earl Lovelace published this novel in 1979 (the year after Edward Said's *Orientalism* is published and the year before the film *The Harder They Come* is released). Kenneth Ramchand aptly points out that this characterization of manhood was/is an important and new note in Caribbean literature (324). Aldrick has been socialized to believe that tapping into his inner feelings is a treason against manhood, a betrayal of who he is supposed to be. However, something else lets him know that this is the only true way to "come home to himself." Now almost thirty years later, it is time for the Jamaican men on the screen to come home to themselves. Visual images need to take a cue from the voices of resistance to denounce the "language of the criminal" and boldly create new scripts of wholeness and humanity.

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Figure 3 Capone in the beginning of *Third World Cop* (page 228)



Figure 4 Biggs in the beginning (and end) of *Shottas* (page 264)

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